Unravelling The Enigma

Marianne Warren

Shirdi Sai Baba in the Light of Sufism

Unravelling The Enigma - Shirdi Sai Baba in the Light of Sufism is an exciting new piece of research which examines Sai Baba of Shirdi from the standpoint of Islamic mysticism - the Deccani Sufism of 19th century Maharashtra - in order to unravel the mystery surrounding the saint. Sai Baba is consistently described by his Hindu biographers as a *'Muslim faqir'* and a mystic, which, by definition, makes him a *Sufi*. However, no previous researcher has examined him thoroughly in this light. The author assumes the reader will have some familiarity with previous biographies of Shirdi Sai Baba and reviews incidents, anecdotes and sayings of the hagiography surrounding Sai Baba, in the light of the goals, practices and stories of the *Sufis* from the golden era of Sufism, and discovers that an amazing similarity and correspondence begins to emerge. Immediately, the more puzzling aspects of the saint's actions and sayings fall away, and Sai Baba himself becomes more understandable, attractive and lovable.

In the book, Dr. Warren brings two new pieces of scholarship to the subject. First she elucidates the English translation of part of the works of some 17th and 18th-century Maharashtrian *Sufi* poet-saints - their contribution having hitherto been neglected by scholars. Their lives and writings echo the life and teachings of Sai Baba. Secondly, she includes the English translation of the previously untranslated Urdu notebook, jotted down by Abdul, Sai Baba's *faqiri* pupil, from teachings based on the *Qur'an* given to him by his *pir* Sai Baba. Both these contributions allow us to see into a world hitherto closed, and expand our awareness of the famous miracle-worker of Shirdi.

While Sai Baba has attain [illegible] universal appeal, transcendi [illegible]

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Dedicated to
Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba

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Foreword

Sai Baba of Shirdi stood for the principles of universal tolerance and peace, and the brotherhood and sisterhood of all mankind. The *bhaktas,* the true devotees of Sai Baba have experienced their spiritual and material aspirations come to fruition through his divine powers. The image of Sai Baba in his shrine offers both spiritual and physical solace to the pilgrims who visit it.

Dr. Marianne Warren's work is the first scholarly attempt to provide a historical context to Sai Baba's teachings. Like Shekh Mahammad and Shah Muni, Sai Baba, as Dr. Warren establishes, belongs to the great Maharshtrian Sufi tradition. Sai Baba should be studied, not in isolation, but as a holy man working within the circles of Maharashtrian *bhakti* saints. Dr. Warren's contribution is outstanding in this respect. An equally original point argued convincingly by Dr. Warren concerns Sai Baba's knowledge of Islamic theology. Dr. Warren has translated the *Saibaba manuscript* in which Sai Baba gave discourses on Islamic history and thought to his pupil Abdulla, his personal attendant, whose tomb rests near Sai Baba's shrine.

Sai Baba is revered, almost worshipped, as God by his many Hindu followers. Towards the end of his life he accommodated a few Hindu rituals and practices to please his devotees. Living in a self-chosen dilapidated mosque in Shirdi, which he called *Dwarakamai*, he worked miracles to cure people of their ailments and sorrows and taught people to have trust in God.

> The true living *Sufi* is the one who has eliminated anger and lust. Constantly he remembers God even while breathing in and out. He avoids useless talk and he enjoys happiness in solitude...He is entranced with love of God and he has lost his consciousness in meditation.

Shekh Mahammad, the sixteenth century Maharashtrian Sufi poet-saint, who wrote this verse might as well have described Shirdi Sai Baba.

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Author's Preface

With an upsurge of devotion to Sai Baba of Shirdi currently sweeping India and the installation of *murtis* there and around the world - this book presents Sai Baba's divinity in the light of Sufism. Initially, I embarked upon my research into the life of Sai Baba and his Maharashtrian spiritual background, in order to gain and present a fuller appreciation of this enigmatic mystic. A number of westerners had remarked to me that they were not drawn to Shirdi Sai Baba finding him austere and hard-to-relate-to with his mystical statements, inexplicable actions and bizarre behaviour. However, I felt that if one could understand him better, a more sympathetic picture would be revealed. In uncovering the facts, I never dreamt that it would turn out to be such a detective story. Gradually, as information was amassed, it became apparent that certain facts did not seem to fit the universally prevailing Hindu *bhakti* view of this saint. All the books that I had read seemed to point to a Hindu saint who had somehow inexplicably, or ignorantly, been deemed a Muslim *faqir*. The point was almost cleared up by the information that Persian officials and later British administrators, used to class all ascetics, Hindu or Muslim, as *faqirs*.[1] However, it was only after coming to terms with the evidence that Sai Baba was, as consistently stated by his Hindu biographers, both a Muslim and a mystic - which by definition makes him a *Sufi* - that his life and teachings began to fall into place. Once I started to investigate him from this *Sufi* standpoint and began to realize how important Sufism had been in the Deccan in the past, only then did I begin to understand and appreciate the full and often awesome significance of Sai Baba. In this book you can also share in this process of detection, chapter by chapter, and weigh for yourself the data presented. At the end, you may reach the same verdict as I did, that Sai Baba, although he had, by the end of his life, transcended all sectarian differences, emerged out of the oral *Sufi* tradition of the Deccan. Understanding the basic Sufism underlying his teachings, albeit unorthodox, instantly clarifies some of the mystery and ambiguity surrounding the Shirdi sage, and makes him more accessible, attractive and endearing.

This book is an adaptation of my Ph.D Dissertation entitled *The Maharashtrian Sufi Context of Hazrat Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi (1838-1918)*, accepted at the University of Toronto in 1996 as part of the requirements for my Doctorate in South Asian Studies. This thesis has now been modified to be more accessible for the general reader, removing much of the original Marathi[2] language quotations included in the original thesis. At the same time I have brought back into the text some essential comparative *Sufi* material that was included in the original thesis (but excluded from the final dissertation) submitted to the University of Toronto. I have also reintroduced some of the more interesting side-issues which were formerly relegated to the endnotes.

The inspiration for writing the thesis and subsequent book sprang from a number of visits made to Sri Sathya Sai Baba and his ashram, Prasanthi Nilayam, in South India at Puttaparthi, in the early 1980s. During this period I learned that Sri Sathya Sai Baba had declared that he was the reincarnation of the then little-known nineteenth-century saint, Sri Sai Baba, who had lived in a village called Shirdi in the State of Maharashtra in Western India. Sathya Sai Baba made this declaration when he was fourteen years old in 1940, by casting flowers on the ground, miraculously forming the Telugu letters for the name "Sai Baba". Sai Baba of Shirdi had never declared a successor saying that he himself would return. To Pedda Bottu Galisharadevi, then a young girl, he confided that he would be born as Sai Baba in Andhra, and that at that time he would ask her to live in his ashram. Sathyanarayana Raju (the future Sathya Sai Baba) was born in 1926 in Andhra Pradesh, eight years after Sai Baba's demise, and in 1943 Pedda Bottu was asked by the contemporary Sai Baba to come and live in his ashram at Puttaparthi. She did go there to stay permanently at a later date, where she was known as Shirdi Ma, living there until the end of her life.[3] Discourses given by Sri Sathya Sai Baba on various occasions in the subsequent decades are recorded in a series of volumes called *Sathya Sai Speaks*. The early volumes are full of references to Shirdi Sai Baba. However, in the early 1980's there was very little independent information available on Shirdi Sai Baba, either in the ashram or in the village of Puttaparthi, although there was a large picture of him in the Mandir alongside that of Sri Sathya Sai Baba (*see* Plate 1), as well as an imposing marble statue of Shirdi Sai sitting on a silver throne, to the left, facing the altar.

In 1979 I had an unusual experience. At that time I was teaching Yoga history, psychology and philosophy in a Yoga Teachers' Training Course at a local Community College and I woke one morning with a strong urge to find out more about Sri Sathya Sai Baba. After a yoga class in Toronto, I decided to look in a nearby second-hand bookstore to see if I could find this information. The shop was empty, and after I had looked in all the likely places, under Eastern religion, India, Saints, Yoga, etc., without finding anything, I turned to walk to the front of the shop to leave. At this point a large book fell from a top shelf. Immediately the thought came that there must be something I should find. I began turning over some books in a nearby cardboard box. I thought to myself how foolish I was - but continued rummaging in the box anyway. At the bottom I found four small books on Sathya Sai Baba and one on Shirdi Sai Baba by Arthur Osborne entitled *The Incredible Sai Baba: The Life and Miracles of a Modern-day Saint*, published in 1957. This was to be my first introduction to the sage.

On one of my early visits to Puttaparthi, Sathya Sai Baba left for a visit to Madras, so I went too, along with a group of devotees. On this trip I was able to visit the Shirdi Sai Baba temple in Madras which is part of the All India Sai Samaj, founded by Narasimhaswami, one of Sai Baba's biographers, whose life and role will be discussed in Part III of this book. This temple was not then affiliated in any way with Sathya Sai Baba, although there is another small Shirdi Sai Baba temple at Guindy, a suburb of Madras, which recognizes Sri Sathya Sai Baba as the reincarnation of the earlier saint. At the first temple I was able to obtain the four-part life of Shirdi Sai Baba by Narasimhaswami entitled *Life of Sai Baba*. Until very recently this book has not been readily available.

The University of Toronto Library system had very little to offer in the way of reference material nor indeed any information on Sai Baba of Shirdi of a scholarly nature. However, on a subsequent visit to India, I was able to visit Shirdi on a trip from Bombay, and learn more about the life of Sai Baba of Shirdi first-hand. I was able to obtain the Marathi version of *Sri Sai Saccarita*, and also the English adaptation *Sri Sai Satcharita*. These works and their authors are discussed in detail later.

Meanwhile my University Studies on the religions of India began to narrow down and focus in on the *bhakti* or devotional tradition of India. An essential element of this topic is the resurgence of *bhakti* in the medieval period, known as the Bhakti Movement. This resurgence occurred all over India, especially in the north, Bengal, Punjab and Maharashtra. Maharashtra was one of the most influential centres of the *Bhakti Movement* with the development of the cult of the deity Vitthala in and around Pandharpur. This study opened up to me a new spiritual world of writers and poet-saints who discovered the way to God-realization through intense devotion to God. First came Jnanadev, whose Marathi commentary on the *Bhagavad-Gita*, known as the *Jnanesvari*, is truly inspiring. So too are the *abhangs* or verse songs of Namdev, Eknath and Tukaram, which were their intense outpourings of devotion to God. One enormously influential book for me was R.D. Ranade's *Mysticism in India - The Poet-saints of Maharashtra*, in defining mysticism. I particularly relate to Tukaram whose life can be said to represent everyman, alternately going from the pinnacle of happiness to the depths of despair, conviction of the presence of God followed by the emptiness of feeling abandoned by God. Here was a man who taught himself to sing the glories of God following the worship of Vitthala and the *varkari panth* (to be discussed later), transforming himself into a renowned *kirtankar* (popular devotional singer), and who eventually attained his goal of a direct experience of God. Today in Maharashtra if a saying is prefaced by '*Tuka mhane*', meaning 'Tuka says', it is accepted that this must be an indisputable truth.

However, it finally dawned on me that, while Sai Baba of Shirdi most certainly was aware of this rich spiritual Hindu tradition, he was not really part of it. Yet he most certainly fitted into the category of *bhakti* saints. Alongside the medieval resurgence of the Bhakti Movement, came the influx of Islam into India through the ruling Mughals. But more important for Maharashtra was the influx of Muslim mystics known as *Sufis*, who established themelves in the Deccan in the medieval period, subsequently founding many centres. Once my mind was set on this line of thought, everything began to fall into place.

In the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries in Maharashtra there were also a number of *Sufi* poet-saints who wrote extensively on spiritual matters and their constant theme was to show the devotional path leading to a direct realization of God. Like Sai Baba, they were Muslim minorities in a Hindu religio-social milieu, and had to accommodate their beliefs by finding parallels between the two religions. While this corpus of literature has been available in Marathi, it had never been properly appreciated outside of Maharashtra nor translated fully into English. With the help of Professor N.K. Wagle in translation, it became apparent that there was a close affinity between the teaching of Sai Baba of Shirdi and that of these *Sufi* poet-saints. The material showing the correspondence of thought and practice is given in Part I of this book.

One of the requirements for a Ph.D. thesis is that it must be a contribution to the literature of the subject. The material on the Maharashtrian *Sufi* poet-saints is therefore a distinct contribution. However, there was to come one more important finding. I had made a number of research trips to India but it was the final day of the last trip that clinched the thesis with regard to the *Sufi* aspect of

Sai Baba. Anyone who has done research in India knows that it is very difficult alone, even more so if one is a woman and a westerner! I was therefore very happy to be coming home to Canada and my family for Christmas. Finishing all I had to do a day or so early, I decided to go direct to Bombay (Mumbai)[4] airport and beg the airline to put me on an earlier flight. When I arrived the airline said they would have been most happy to do this for me, except that unfortunately there was no flight that day! My disappointment plunged to the depths - I would have to spend more than 24 hours alone in Bombay, two days before Christmas. 'Swami', I prayed, 'what do you want me to do?' The idea then came that I should phone Mr.V.B.Kher, co-author of *Sai Baba of Shirdi - A Unique Saint*, whom I had visited on my outgoing trip. I had nothing special to discuss with him but he was the only contact I had in Bombay at that time. He graciously invited me to his home where we discussed the results of my current research. In the course of conversation, I casually mentioned that I had come across reference to a notebook that Abdul, Sai Baba's servant and Muslim *faqiri* devotee, had reportedly made while he sat reading the *Qur'an* with Sai Baba. On a whim I asked Mr. Kher if he thought it would ever be possible to get a copy of this notebook. He looked at me strangely, and, after a long pause, told me the following story. While he was a trustee of the Sai Baba Sansthan at Shirdi from 1984-89, he had come across Abdul's notebook wrapped in red silk in the manner of all revered *pothi* or sacred texts in Maharashtra, in storage exactly where it had been placed after Abdul's death in 1954. The majority of the text was written in Urdu, probably unreadable to everyone currently living in Shirdi, so it had not been touched since. Since Mr. Kher was planning to author a book about Sai Baba of Shirdi in collaboration with Mr. Kamath, a Bombay journalist, he thought it might be of interest. Prior to having it translated, he took it to be photocopied but met with negative reactions wherever he went as the paper was too fragile, and would have fallen apart during the process. Finally one print shop manager, recognising its value as sacred literature, offered to wrap each page in transparent plastic before photocopying it, and made a number of copies which he had spiral-bound. True to the spirit that money should not be involved in spiritual matters, he said it was his sacred duty to help preserve this work and so refused any payment. Thus it was that Mr. Kher had in his possession a number of copies of Abdul's manuscript. Leaving the room, he returned with a beautiful copy which he then presented to me. As he himself had received it free as a gift, he insisted that it was his sacred duty in turn to gift a copy to me. This was the best Christmas present I have ever received!

The result of acquiring this manuscript is highlighted in Part II of the book and the English translation is given in full. Its content and significance is also given there. Although not essential to the basic thesis of Sai Baba's *Sufi* background, it is the icing on the cake so to speak, confirming with concrete evidence what had previously been mere conjecture. Thus, Hazrat Sai Baba of Shirdi became the topic for my Ph.D. Dissertation, which has subsequently been revised for the general reader and entitled *The Divine Sufi - Sai Baba of Shirdi.* '*Hazrat*' is a *Sufi* honorific, which was bestowed on Sai Baba by Meher Baba, whose own ashram was very close to Shirdi, and who was in touch with all the spiritual masters of the time. While Meher Baba was a Parsi and a spiritual Master in his own right, it is significant that he would refer to the Shirdi saint with the *Sufi* title Hazrat Sai Baba. However, for this book I have not retained the title *Hazrat*, as today it may impart the false impression that Sai Baba was an orthodox Muslim.

While this book is not primarily about Sri Sathya Sai Baba, it was through my interest in the South Indian holy man that this book on Shirdi Sai Baba came to be written, and thus it is dedicated to him. Today many devotees of Sathya Sai Baba do not find the Shirdi sage so appealing, and I am also aware that Shirdi Sai Baba devotees do not feel drawn to the more flamboyant Sathya Sai Baba. While there are currently hundreds of books about Sathya Sai Baba, this book seeks to make Shirdi Sai Baba more understandable and more endearing by highlighting his *Sufi* connection, for once this background is understood one can more readily relate to him, love and understand him. Sri Sathya Sai Baba has revealed that his divine mission to usher in a new golden age, will take the lifetimes of a triple *avatar* or descent of the divine in human form, so polluted and evil has the world become at the end of the *Kaliyuga*. He has declared that this triple incarnation is Shirdi Sai Baba, Sathya Sai Baba and Prema Sai Baba who will be born eight years after the demise of Sathya Sai Baba, thus spanning more than a quarter of a millenium. The dominant religious tradition in the Sathya Sai incarnation is Hinduism. As the few pictures of the future Prema Sai Baba given by Sathya Sai Baba show, he looks very like Jesus, and this may represent the second coming of Christ for Christianity. The other major religion in the world is Islam, and the Muslims may be drawn into his fold because, as we have shown, Shirdi Sai Baba was a Muslim *Sufi*. So the triple Sai Incarnation will embrace all the major religions. It is very hard today to speak of Shirdi Sai Baba without some reference to Sathya Sai Baba for this Swami has been speaking about the Shirdi incarnation for nearly sixty years, and much of what he has said throughout this period, has now entered the hagiography of the Maharashtrian saint. Although in appearance and life-style Sai Baba of Shirdi and Sri Sathya Sai Baba seem at opposite poles of the spectrum, the one an ascetic dedicated to poverty with an emphasis on pragmatism, the other presenting the charismatic aura of a popular orange-robed *swami* with an encyclopedic command of India's ancient *sastras*, yet their teachings, at core, are identical. The material, linking the two incarnations of Sai Baba, is now so extensive that it cannot be included here, so, with the grace of God, it will form the basis of a future book.

There are a number of individuals to whom I am very much indebted for their help along the way, first in producing the thesis, and now the book, *Shirdi Sai Baba -The Divine Sufi.* First I must thank my Supervisor, Professor N.K. Wagle, for all his help and guidance throughout the period of research and writing of my Ph.D. thesis. His thorough knowledge of Maharashtra, its customs, language, beliefs, history and peoples has been of paramount importance in guiding me to a fuller understanding of Sai Baba's life and teachings. I am also grateful to him for writing the Foreword. Second, I must thank Professor Joseph O'Connell, who guided my M.A. thesis, and encouraged me to pursue the topic of Sai Baba for a Ph.D. dissertation. As a member of the Ph.D. thesis committee he offered comments and corrections that were very helpful. Whenever he heard of relevant literature, he was kind enough to either give me a copy or pass the information concerning it along to me.

I am greatly indebted to Mr. V.B. Kher, the co-author of *Sai Baba of Shirdi: A Unique Saint*, and his wife, Dr. Smt. Indira Kher, in Bombay, India, who have been very helpful and supportive in my field research. Mr. Kher lent me his handwritten translation into English of *Shri Sai Baba*, by Sri Sai Sharan Anand, from its original Gujarati. I am happy to say I was able to repay his kindness in part by typing this manuscript and finding a publisher. It has recently been released on *Ramanavami* April 16, 1997. It was also through Mr. Kher's efforts that I was able to obtain a copy of Abdul's notebook, subsequently named the *Saibaba MS* for the purpose of this book. I especially wish to express my profound gratitude to them both for their constant interest, help and encouragement throughout this project. I would also like to thank Dr. Rizwan Malik, a Doctoral student at the University of Toronto at the time, who helped me translate the *Saibaba MS* from the Urdu. Dr. Malik sat with me for many hours deciphering often illegible lettering and translating the manuscript. I also thank Mr. Jannab Sayyed Azam Ali Sufi, to whom I was introduced in Aurangabad, India, who holds the title *Qadiri Qutub-e-Daccan*. He read the translation and carefully went through it and made suggestions for improvement from a *Sufi* point of view. I also thank Mr. Amrit Bahal of Toronto, whose insightful comments were helpful in the reconstruction of the meaning of parts of the *Saibaba MS,* from some of the more cryptic notes. I am further indebted to Mr. Kher who was very helpful in producing a more coherent version of Sai Baba's words while retaining as accurate an English version of the original as possible.

There are a number of individuals who were very helpful to me in my research in India, and to whom I owe a great debt of gratitude. First was Professor N.R. Rajderkar and his wife, with whom I stayed in Aurangabad, and who accompanied me to Shirdi, introducing me to some of the significant people there. Then there is the grandson and family of G. R. Dabholkar, who still occupy the house in Khar, Bombay, where the *Sri Sai Saccarita* was written. They were most generous in showing me memorabilia of Dabholkar's time and the altar in their kitchen with the famous picture of Sai Baba referred to in the book, and in making rare photographs available to me. I also thank Smt. Zarine Taraporevala for inviting me to her home in Bombay, and providing me with copies of her English translations of Das Ganu's works on Sai Baba. And finally I am indebted to Shaikh Abdul Razak Shah Biyabani of Poona who is one of the few living *Sufi* Masters in India. He graciously received me in his *khanaqah* and invited me to a prayer meeting there. He talked to me on a number of occasions on *Sufi* precepts and gave me booklets he had authored, and arranged for me to be shown the *dargah* of Hazrat Babajan close by.

In Canada, I would like to thank Mrs. Sunanda Tumne for her patience and time in teaching me Marathi. I am also very much indebted to my friend Michilynn Dubeau of the Centre for South Asian Studies for her encouragement and help, and her invaluable assistance in editing. Throughout the period of research and writing of this book, there have been many people that I have met along the way whom I would like to thank for their direct or indirect contribution. Although they are too numerous to mention by name, their help both in India and Canada has been greatly appreciated. Finally, I particularly thank my husband, Michael, for being a constant support and encouragement to finish first the thesis, and now this book. His help has been ongoing over seven years, accompanying me to India and proof-reading the endless drafts.

Finally, for the reader's information, I wish to make it clear that

I have no particular bias towards either Hinduism or Islam. I respect and honour both approaches to the divine Reality. Being born in England, my background is Christian and until my studies I had no special contact with either Hinduism or Islam. I hope that, by standing outside the Hindu/Muslim tension still prevalent in India today, I have been able to shed some light and contribute to a deeper understanding of the life and teachings of the enigmatic saint Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi.

April 1999 **Dr Marianne Warren**
Toronto, Canada

NOTES

1. Carl Ernst, *Sufism* (Boston and London: Shambala, 1997) p. 4.
2. All diacritical marks in both Sanskrit and Marathi have been omitted in the interest of simplicity.
3. Peddabottu Galisharadevi, *Sriya Charitra*, autobiography in Telugu (Prasanthi Nilayam, Puttaparthi, 1985), p. 153.
4. In India today, certain cities have reverted to their Indian names from their previous anglicized designation, e.g. Bombay is now Mumbai; Madras is now Chennai; and Poona is now Pune. For clarity, I will use the form appropriate to the time referred to in the text - generally Bombay, Madras and Poona unless the reference is very modern.

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Introduction

Sai Baba of Shirdi, it has been said, was 'a *Perfect Sufi* and a *Parama Bhagavata*'[1], and thus in this dual role he links the two major traditions of India - *Islam* and *Hinduism*. These are both technical terms within their respective traditions - a *Sufi* who is 'Perfect' is a Muslim mystic who has reached the pinnacle of God-realization, while in the Hindu tradition a *Parama Bhagavata* has attained the inner status of a supreme enlightened Divinity. Others have seen Sai Baba as the 'pioneer of spiritual renaissance in comparatively modern times.'[2] Although these epithets, applied to an obscure nineteenth-century Indian Muslim *faqir*, may initially seem pretentious, now with his mushrooming popularity in the last few decades they indicate that, in the eyes and experience of many devotees, Sai Baba was indeed a fully God-realized Master on a divine mission.

Sai Baba was indeed a paradox - on the one hand he appeared to be a simple unlettered ascetic, on the other, the very embodiment of Divinity - while Hindus revered him as a Hindu, he had every appearance of being Muslim - if Muslim then he was not an orthodox Muslim, but was unconventional to the point of being heterodox - and at his death in 1918 he had but a handful of close devotees, while today his devotees number in the millions. Far from being a local Maharashtrian miracle-worker unknown to the outside world, today his *murti* or statue is to be found in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, and in the Vishnu Temple in Toronto, Canada, half a world away. The enigma continues, for he declared that even after his death he would still be present, albeit in a subtle form, to help his devotees, and indeed there does exist a large and growing volume of testimonial literature authored by latter-day devotees, attesting to the truth of his statement.

Until recently Sai Baba has been the sole prerogative of 'devotees', but now he is attracting the attention of the academic world.[3] This book seeks to unravel some of the enigma that surrounds the life of Sai Baba, to place him in the spiritual context of Maharashtra in western India, which has a rich heritage of both *bhakti* and *Sufi* saints, and to re-examine the Hindu gloss given by virtually all of his biographers from 1910 onwards. The *'Parama Bhagavata*' half of the opening quotation has been fully explored in numerous Hindu-authored biographies and books about Sai Baba, but the other half - the '*Perfect Sufi*' aspect of the saint has been almost totally ignored. Therefore, in this work Sai Baba will be examined in the light of *Sufism*, to elucidate a clearer understanding of him. The recent discovery and translation of a manuscript of a notebook, written in Urdu by Abdul, Sai Baba's *Sufi* pupil or *murid*, has helped to confirm Sai Baba's Muslim and *Sufi* origins and predilections.[4]

Sai Baba was constantly referred to by his biographers, as either a Muslim *faqir* or mystic, or as an *awliya* or Muslim saint.[5] In esoteric Islam, a Muslim mystic is by definition known as a *Sufi* or alternatively a *faqir*; the term refers either to one traversing the *Sufi tariqat* or spiritual path towards God-realization, or to one who has already attained God-realization. The latter was its original meaning, for according to al-Sarraj, 'genuine *Sufis* [were those] whose heart God has vivified by gnosis'[6] - meaning God-realized, but today in general usage the term has come to include one still treading the path. The term *fuqara* (plural of *faqir*) is applicable to all initiates on the Sufi path and literally means poor men, denoting those practicing Sufism. Although the term *faqir* was used extensively in the Sai Baba literature, the term *Sufi* was used only rarely to describe Sai Baba. Unfortunately, today this term carries negative innuendos - such as holy frauds or wandering rogues who lie on a bed of nails, etc., never intended in its original use. Thus, for this book Sai Baba is being promoted as a *Sufi*, rather than a *faqir*. Narasimhaswami made the comment that 'the ideas which Baba [was] thoroughly soaked up in up to the last were in no way distinguishable from Sufism'.[7] Yet today, almost without exception, he is treated and revered as a Hindu saint and incarnation of God, known as an *avatar*, and the worship at his tomb reflects the Hindu ritualistic *puja* enacted daily at any Hindu shrine. Furthermore, most of the biographies and secondary literature have couched his life and teachings in terms of the language, philosophy and devotion associated with the Hindu Maharashtrian *bhakti* milieu. While many devotees have derived great spiritual help from these writings, this book will attempt to provide an additional perspective on Sai Baba's life and teachings, and highlight the *Sufi* aspect of the saint within the context of Maharashtra. It aims to redress the *Sufi-Bhakti* imbalance and re-emphasize certain universal elements shared by Indian Sufism, particularly Deccani Sufism, and the *Bhakti movement* in Maharashtra, which the life of Sai Baba epitomized.

Sources for the book

There exists a relatively large corpus of information and source material on the life of Sai Baba in Shirdi from the period 1910-1918 towards the end of his life, but there is very little verifiable data on his early life, and most of this material may be classified as hagiography, and therefore not reliable as historical fact. Traditionally, the oral hagiography of many rural saints in India is not written down until many decades or even centuries after a saint passes away, but in the case of Sai Baba there are a number of sources of information actually recorded during Sai Baba's lifetime, or very soon thereafter. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Shirdi was a typical remote village, and at the folk level people relied on memory, and information was transmitted orally. It was only with the arrival, in the early decades of the twentieth century, of an educated, mostly Brahman elite and professional people from Bombay, that day-to-day occurrences, teachings and miracles in the life of Sai Baba began to be systematically recorded.

The most important source of information about the life and teaching of Sai Baba of Shirdi that can be deemed as authoritative is the *Sri Sai Saccarita*[8], a devotional biography written in Marathi by Govind Raghunath Dabholkar, a Brahman working as a government clerk (*see* Plate 2). The spelling of the Romanized transliteration of the Marathi *Sri Sai Saccarita* has been retained throughout this book in order to distinguish it from Gunaji's English adaptation of the same title *Sri Sai Satcharita*. The overriding value of Dabholkar's book lies in the fact that, unlike any other source, it was commenced with the full authority of Sai Baba himself, who blessed the undertaking in his unique style by giving sacred ash, known as *udi*, to Dabholkar, saying: "He has my complete support; he will be the instrument through which I will write my own story."[9] Dabholkar's initial motivation was to record Sai Baba's day-to-day miracles, and to foster awareness of the more spiritual dimension of the sage. He had direct access to and contact with Sai Baba sporadically over the years between 1910 and 1916, until he took up permanent residence in Shirdi in 1916 when he retired. The gathering of the data for the biography thus commenced in 1910, and pertains to events and miracles which the author personally witnessed in the last eight years of the saint's life. Legendary aspects and actual events overlap, as is usual in hagiographical accounts of saints. The book was finally completed and published in 1929, eleven years after the saint's death. The *Sri Sai Saccarita* was Dabholkar's 'offering', and it is a devotional work which never had the pretension of being a scholastic biography with a detailed chronology. Dabholkar followed the traditional Maharashtrian style of sacred literature in which precise dating is positively eschewed, modelling his work on the style of a fifteenth-century revered Marathi classic text, *Sree Guru Caritra* by Gangadhar Saraswati about the life of Sri Guru, also known as Dattatreya, and two of his major incarnations.[10] Dabholkar was no doubt inspired to model his *Sri Sai Saccarita* on this work due to the fact that Sai Baba, while still alive, was also heralded as a modern incarnation of Dattatreya. Dabholkar composed the work in Marathi *ovi* verse, or short lyrical poems, but its style is rough and contrived in comparison with the smooth literary Marathi of his model the *Sree Guru Caritra*. It would be much easier to read the *Sri Sai Saccarita* had it been confined to prose, but Dabholkar was following an age-old tradition of writing biographies of saints in verse form. Sai Baba, he felt, was a saint and therefore his biography must perforce be written in verse in order to make it acceptable within the Marathi religious milieu.

The *Sri Sai Saccarita* contains a great deal of factual information, even as it follows the devotional tradition of extolling the saint's virtues at the beginning of each of its 53 chapters (51, plus an *Epilogue* and *Epitome*). However, as a Brahman steeped in his own Hindu tradition, Dabholkar had practically no knowledge of Islam or Sufism. He was inspired merely to record what he saw, and when he did not understand the enigmatic mystic, he would rationalize sayings and events in conformity with his own religious background. In spite of the handicap of being unfamiliar with Muslim practices and language, Dabholkar nevertheless faithfully recorded events bearing on Islamic practices. For example, he recorded the fact that Sai Baba would occasionally go through the special Muslim sacrificial ritual, known as *takkya*, when a goat was about to be killed on an altar, in order to ensure that the meat would be *halal*, or appropriately purified. Such a sight would be abhorrent to a Brahman.[11] Dabholkar's *Sri Sai Saccarita* has come to be regarded as sacred literature or *pothi*, and is widely revered in Maharashtra. It has been the major source of stories and information on Sai Baba for a majority of the secondary books which have been published over the years.

The English adaptation of Dabholkar's *Sri Sai Saccarita* by Nagesh Vasudev Gunaji, already referred to, has the same title anglicized to *Sri Sai Satcharita*, and it has the sub-title *The Wonderful Life and Teachings of Shri Sai Baba*.[12] Since being published in 1944, this book, although merely claimed by the author as an adaptation of the Marathi work, is today generally taken by the English world to be a verbatim translation of Dabholkar's original work. However, basic research reveals that this is not the case. Gunaji frequently added sections of his own Hindu interpretation of the saint's words and actions. He includes quotations from the *Shri Sai Leela* journal, which has been publishing devotees' experiences since its inception in the late 1920's, and is the 'official organ of the Shirdi Sansthan'.[13] Sometimes Gunaji includes extra information which was not originally available to Dabholkar at the time of his writing, such as details to the story of how Sai Baba's *padukas* or footprints, came to be installed under the *neem* tree.[14] In other places, material from the Dabholkar original is omitted altogether. Thus the graphic description of the above mentioned goat slaughter is completely missing from chapter 38 in the English adaptation, where Gunaji simply reports that Sai Baba made *pulav* with meat.[15]

Many of the secondary authors have made the mistake of assuming that Gunaji's book is a direct verbatim English translation of Dabholkar's work. So in order to note the differences between the original and Gunaji's adaptation, portions of Dabholkar's *Sri Sai Saccarita* have been re-translated from the Marathi throughout the book. Many devotees also confuse Dabholkar's book, blessed by Sai Baba himself, with Gunaji's adaptation which did not receive any specific blessing from Sai Baba. It is the original work which is to be regarded as sacred, with a seven-day reading or *parayana* being recommended as spiritually beneficial. A number of secondary writers who have used Gunaji's work as the basis for their understanding of Sai Baba without any further research, have unwittingly perpetuated his Hindu gloss on the saint. For example, Perin S. Bharucha, a Parsi lady[16] admits that her book *Sai Baba of Shirdi* is 'a distillate of anecdotes of Sai Baba contained in Nagesh Gunaji's English rendition of the *Sri Sai Satcharita*'.[17] Not realizing that Gunaji added sections of his own Vedantic explanation not found in Dabholkar's original, this author places much of Gunaji's Hindu interpretation as coming directly from the lips of Sai Baba. Satya Pal Ruhela, in his recent book *What Researchers Say on Sri Shirdi Sai Baba*,[18] also appears to equate Gunaji's English adaptation with the original Marathi biography, as he gives no separate bibliographic entry for Gunaji. Ruhela does not even mention Dabholkar's original 1929 date of publication, but lists it as 1944, the date of the English adaptation.

The confusion of the original Marathi work by Dabholkar with the English adaptation by Gunaji is significant, because a close line-by-line comparison between the two reveals that Gunaji was indeed very selective in his translations, deliberately omitting whole sections which he decided were not relevant. Many of these omitted sections include numerous specific references to Muslims, Muslim practices and *Sufi* precepts. Gunaji, like Dabholkar, was a Hindu with perhaps little knowledge, understanding or appreciation of the Muslim religion and the finer points of the *Sufi* tradition. His adaptation, it transpires, has unwittingly had the effect of giving a further Hindu gloss to Sai Baba. Marathi readers would not likely bother to read an English version, and few English readers have the ability to read the Marathi, so this subtle gloss has gone largely unnoticed, much less challenged, over the last fifty years. Dabholkar regarded every word, saying and action of Sai Baba as sacred, and thus felt a moral obligation to be accurate in his written record. In his book he repeatedly acknowledged Sai Baba's Muslim *faqir* status. Thus, for example, whenever Sai Baba spoke in Deccani Urdu he recorded it, albeit transcribing it into Marathi script. Gunaji, on the other hand, felt no such obligation and important points such as Sai Baba's frequent use of Urdu words are completely lost in his English adaptation. A small example is Dabholkar's description of Sai Baba's control of the elements, when during a fierce thunderstorm with lightning and floods of water, Sai Baba cried: '*Sabur Sabur*' in Urdu. The English version 'Stop, stop your fury', although grammatically correct, has lost all the Muslim innuendo of these two words.[19] While Gunaji acknowledges his work as merely 'an adaptation' of Dabholkar's book, he retained the title of the original, even though there was a substantive difference in content. This fact has led to much confusion, and today Gunaji's work must be regarded as a separate book which has wielded significant influence in its own right. Dr. Smt. Indira Kher has completed a new English translation of the *Sri Sai Saccarita*, which will be published in the near future. This translation will no doubt remedy the discrepancies between the Marathi original and Gunaji's English adaptation. For this present book, the original Marathi *Sri Sai Saccarita* has been used for key interpretive passages, while the English adaptation *Sri Sai Satcharita* is used for describing episodes from Sai Baba's life where the accuracy of the translation has been verified.

Memoirs of contemporary devotees

While Dabholkar was the major writer detailing the last decade of Sai Baba's life, having written two chapters before Sai Baba passed away and the rest after, a number of other contemporary devotees subsequently wrote their own memoirs which were later published: Das Ganu, G.S. Khaparde, Rao Bahadur M.V. Pradhan, Hari Sitaram Dikshit (sometimes spelt Dixit), and Waman Bhai Patel alias Sai Sharan Anand - all of whom it should be noted were Hindu and also high-caste Brahmans (in Maharashtra, members of the Brahmin caste were referred to as Brahmans).

Das Ganu, more formally known as Ganpat Rao Dattatreya Sahasrabuddhe, was one of Sai Baba's devotees whom Sai Baba drew to Shirdi 'like a sparrow, with a thread tied to its feet.'[20] He was a policeman who initially had no interest in spiritual matters, but rather the reverse, composing secular folk-dramas and popular songs with suggestive lyrics, known as *tamashas* and *lavani*. He was brought to Shirdi as part of his job with the Deputy Collector, Nana Chandorkar, in 1894. Over a number of years Sai Baba transformed him into a *kirtankar*, singing the praises of saints, and performing regularly at the *urs* fair of Sai Baba from 1897, and after 1912 at the combined *Ramnavami-urs* festival at Shirdi (*see* Plate 3). He later wrote three books in Marathi praising saints, and in these books several chapters were devoted to the life and miracles of Sai Baba: *Santa Kathamrita* (The Sweet Stories of the Saints), in 1903; *Bhakta Lilamrita* (Sweet Miracles Performed for Devotees), in 1906; and *Bhakti Saramrita* (Quintessence of Devotion), in 1925 after Sai Baba's demise.[21] These have not been published in English translation. Das Ganu also composed a poem *Shri Sainath - Stavan Manjari* which has been translated twice, once by Zarine Taraporevala as *A Humble Tribute in Praise* *of Sainath*, and again by D.Y. Biniwale entitled *The Blossom of Praise to Shri Sainath*.[22] As Das Ganu was a Hindu, the praise of Sai Baba is couched in ornate Hindu symbolism and mythology, and in his *kirtans* he elaborated a poetic hagiography around the life of Sai Baba, drawing on earlier folk tales, which is largely discarded today as poetic licence.

Abdul Ghani Munsiff wrote an influential article entitled *Hazrat Sai Baba of Shirdi*, which was published in 1938-39 in the *Meher Baba Journal*.[23] The English article is based on, and in fact, provides a summary of Das Ganu's Marathi work *Bhakta Lilamrita*. Although Munsiff himself was Muslim, he unfortunately reiterates the unlikely Hindu hagiography contrived by Das Ganu, thus further perpetuating it amongst English-reading devotees. Munsiff also quotes extensively from unpublished discourses and conversations with Meher Baba, a Parsi (Zoroastrian) 'God-man', who was a contemporary of Sai Baba. He popularized Meher Baba's view of Sai Baba as a 'Perfect master' in the *Sufi* tradition, and added currency to the title '*Hazrat*' for Sai Baba.

Ganesh Shrikrishna Khaparde, a well-known advocate, member of the Central Legislative Assembly in Bombay and aide of Lokamanya Tilak, was perhaps one of the most politically prominent men to come into Sai Baba's circle. He and his wife came to visit Sai Baba first in 1910, staying for seven days, then again for three to four months in 1911. He kept a detailed 'diary' on both occasions and his descriptions provide a window on day-to-day life in Shirdi centred around Sai Baba, whom he alone seems to have called 'Sayin Maharaj'. He noted the various devotees and visitors who came to Shirdi and highlighted their experiences. Although not initially written for publication, it is now somewhat of a historical document, having been first published in 1918. That original edition is now long out of print. The *Shri Sai Leela* journal printed Khaparde's 'diary' sequentially from August 1985 to February 1986, and it was re-published by the Sri Sai Baba Sansthan as *Shirdi Diary of The Hon'ble Mr.G.S. Khaparde*.[24] It has periodically been re-printed, but with no date given.

M.V. Pradhan's *Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi (A Glimpse of Indian Spirituality)*, published in 1933, is a small booklet, which can be regarded as primary source material on the life of Sai Baba and as a corollary to Dabholkar's work.[25] Pradhan's work is an English account based on Marathi notes, memories and eye-witness accounts of Hari Sitaram Dikshit, a long-standing devotee of Sai Baba whom he called 'Shri Sainath Maharaj'. Dikshit in turn was known as 'Kakasaheb' by Sai Baba, a typically Maharashtrian term of endearment meaning 'uncle'. Pradhan was a Member of the Bombay Legislative Council, and one of the group of the Bombay elite who were committed to Sai Baba. His booklet reflects a view of Sai Baba at the end of his life, as encountered by a Hindu striving to understand the enigmatic saint's mystic utterances.

Swami Sai Sharan Anand, a lawyer devotee of Sai Baba, was originally known as Waman Bhai Patel until he changed his name on taking *sannyas*a in 1953. He wrote a biography called *Shri Sai Baba* which was based on his personal relationship with Sai Baba. It was originally written in Gujarati in the early 1960's, and translated into Marathi by V.B. Kher in 1982. Kher has also translated *Shri Sai Baba* into English and this translation has recently been published in early 1997.[26] Sharan Anand visited Sai Baba at Shirdi a number of times, and in 1913 he stayed there for eleven months. Much of the material for his biography was culled from these visits. A short account of his eleven-month stay in Shirdi has been published in English under the title *Shri Sai the Superman*.[27] One of the most significant contributions of this source concerns the childhood of Sai Baba. Sharan Anand states that Sai Baba left his birthplace of Pathri at the age of eight in the company of a *Sufi faqir*, whereas Dabholkar states that Sai Baba was entrusted at the age of four to the care of a Hindu *guru* named Venkusha, an issue to be discussed in a later chapter.

Secondary Authors

Next came a series of on Sai Baba who had no contact with Sai Baba while alive, but who were very impressed with reports of him and wrote extensively about him. Such an author was B.V.

Narasimhaswami who was to become the third most influential writer on Sai Baba after Dabholkar and Gunaji. After searching for a spiritual *guru* for many years, Narasimhaswami learned about Sai Baba through Sri Upasani Maharaj, a well-known spiritual teacher in the 1930's who had earlier been one of Sai Baba's ardent disciples. Narasimhaswami was to become a committed advocate of Sai Baba to the extent that he eventually became known as Sai Baba's 'Apostle'. In 1942 he published *Devotees' Experiences of Sri Sai Baba*, which consists of interviews with as many of Sai Baba's devotees who were still living and available, plus any individuals who had come into close contact with the saint before he passed away in 1918.[28] The majority of Narasimhaswami's interviews were conducted in the year 1936, with a few in 1938. He also collected 'sayings' of Sai Baba from these same memories of devotees, many of which are not found elsewhere, and he published them in 1942 under the title *Sri Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings*.[29]

The 1950's spawned a number of offshoot books based on the raw material given in the works of Dabholkar, Gunaji, and Narasimhaswami just cited. All these secondary writers present an individual exposition of Sai Baba, although the basic facts they wove into their narrative accounts were all drawn from these same sources. Many of these authors wrote in English and were from Hindu backgrounds; Sufism was largely unknown to them and alien to their way of thinking. Thus, apart from acknowledging a few Muslim anomalies, they tend to further elaborate the Hindu interpretation of Sai Baba. Three examples are cited, two aimed largely towards an Indian audience, and one aimed at Western readers. The first is Mani Sahukar's *Sai Baba: The Saint of Shirdi*, which was first published in India in 1952.[30] A devotee of Sri Upasani Maharaj and the latter's successor Sati Godavari Mata, she includes a small monograph on each at the end of her book. She added a further monograph on Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba in the third edition published in 1983. This is a rather brief secondary work for in her author's note she acknowledges that much of her information came from Dabholkar's *Sri Sai*

Saccarita, and Narasimhaswami's *Shri Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings*. Narasimhaswami wrote the Foreword to Sahukar's book, dated May 1951, and her book was in fact published three or four years before his own major biography, *Life of Sai Baba*, appeared.

Sahukar's work is a devotee's account of Sai Baba and she openly relates her own transcendental experiences of the saint. Although Sai Baba never proclaimed Upasani Maharaj of Sakori to be his successor, saying that he himself would care for his devotees after his physical demise, Sahukar, having a spiritual affinity not only with the Sakori sage, but also with his successor Godavari Mata, obviously felt that they were indeed Sai Baba's successors. In the 1930's Upasani Maharaj had become a great pandit who, together with Godavari Mata, was steeped in Vedanta, so it was perhaps natural that Sahukar should absorb their orientation and place Sai Baba within a Hindu context describing him as an *avatar* or *Sat Purusa*, terms she employs throughout. She describes all the aspects of Sai Baba's teaching; the importance of the *guru*; *sadhanas* or spiritual practices; *lilas* or miracles; *daksina* or money gifts; and his role in the revival of *bhakti* - entirely from the standpoint of *Sanatana Dharma* or the orthodox Hindu interpretation, to the point where the casual reader would naturally conclude that Sai Baba was a Hindu saint.

Secondly, in 1952, *The Spiritual Symphony of Shree Sainath of Shirdi* was published by Rao Saheb Harshad P. Mehta.[31] Mehta acknowledges his debt to Hemadpant (a pet name used by Sai Baba for Dabholkar) on page 102, and then goes on to acknowledge the English version by Gunaji, saying that both books are available at the Shirdi Sansthan. Mehta's aim was to set Sai Baba in context, using the biographical details of Sai Baba's life. His work attempts to integrate Sai Baba into a more universal world view, incorporating ideas from Biblical history, parallels with the life of Christ, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the philosophy of Sankaracharaya and some western philosophers, as well as those of individuals such as Max Muller, John Woodroffe and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. Mehta also is Hindu and the overall tenor of his book reflects this fact.

Finally, a secondary work, generated from Narasimhaswami's published research, was written especially to introduce Sai Baba to a Western audience. This booklet by the English devotee Arthur Osborne, *The Incredible Sai Baba: The Life and Miracles of a Modern-day Saint*, was published in India in 1957.[32] Sai Baba was virtually unknown outside of India until Osborne's small book was re-published in Great Britain in 1958. Osborne was personally steeped in Hindu thought, particularly *Advaita Vedanta*, and felt that 'it is perhaps natural that it should have been left to a Westerner to make Sai Baba known to the West.'[33] Like Narasimhaswami, he was an admirer of the sage Ramana Maharshi in Tiruvannamalai, and discovered Sai Baba through the writings of Narasimhaswami. *The Incredible Sai Baba* remained the only book on Sai Baba available in the West for decades. For the most part, Osborne is indebted to Narasimhaswami for his background information, which he organizes into thematic chapters. Osborne thus perpetuates the Hindu gloss on Sai Baba initiated by the Indian biographers.

Before Osborne's book was actually printed Narasimhaswami finished writing his biography *Life of Sai Baba*, based on his own earlier research.[34] This biography, based on much of the 'oral history' culled from his 1936 and 1938 interviews with devotees, was published in four parts around 1955-56. Part one details Sai Baba's life; parts two and three detail the lives of his close devotees; and part four details Sai Baba's teachings and the Sai Movement. There are several drawbacks with this biography even though it is well-researched and well-written. Firstly, Narasimhaswami never actually met Sai Baba, only coming to hear of him in the early 1930's some fifteen years after his physical demise, so that his work does not have the immediacy of his biography of Ramana Maharshi, with whom the author personally interacted.[35] Secondly, the information on which he based his account was secondhand, through memories of devotees and individuals who had come into contact with Sai Baba when he was alive. Thirdly, Narasimhaswami's informants were largely Hindus, the majority being Brahmans from Bombay. After 1910, there was a large influx of Hindus attracted to Shirdi through the auspices of an influential devotee, Nana Chandorkar, and also through the *kirtans* of Das Ganu. These are the people who initially told their experiences to Dabholkar, and many of these same individuals were later found and re-interviewed by Narasimhaswami, providing the raw material for his work. Narasimhaswami informs us that although there were a good number of Muslims, attracted either by the money Sai Baba distributed to *faqirs* or by his miraculous powers, it was difficult for him to find any Muslims 'who got in spiritual touch with Baba'.[36] He made no special effort to investigate the *Sufi faqir* community, its origins and the extent of its interaction with Sai Baba, that must have existed prior to and around the time of the arrival of the Bombay crowd, although there are numerous subtle references to it, which will be discussed later. Lastly, his research appertains to Sai Baba's last decade or so, primarily the period between 1910 and 1918, and thus is not a comprehensive biography. Unlike Das Ganu, he made no special investigations further afield, in such places as Aurangabad, Selu or Pathri, for biographical details of Sai Baba's earlier life.

While Narasimhaswami has performed an invaluable service in preserving information from devotees which would otherwise have been lost, he, like Gunaji, tends to perpetuate the Hindu gloss on Sai Baba. Nevertheless, Narasimhaswami's books form a major source of information on Sai Baba, and have made a significant contribution to the spread of the Sai Baba Movement, particularly in South India. He can be credited with almost single-handedly introducing Sai Baba to South India, particularly in Madras, spreading the Sai message through his organisation of the All India Sai Samaj, started in 1939. His books are available at the Sai Baba temple in Madras, but were not available in Shirdi, nor indeed in Maharashtra, during the period of my research.

Narasimhaswami's own biography was written by Swami Sai Padananda, who became a devotee of Sai Baba in Madras through the auspices of the Swami, entitled *Sri Narasimha Swamiji: Apostle of Sri Sai Baba the Saint of Shirdi*, published in 1973.[37]

The value of this biography is that it describes Narasimhaswami's deep spiritual nature and sterling character, and illustrates his deep commitment to the Hindu path of devotion, the *bhakti marga*, having found the path of knowledge, the *jnana marga,* unsuited to his temperament. As Sufism itself is the mysticism of intense love of God to the exclusion of all else, Narasimhaswami could easily relate to Sai Baba's teachings.

A harsh critique of Narasimhaswami is found in Kevin Shepherd's monograph entitled *Gurus Rediscovered: Biographies of Sai Baba of Shirdi and Upasani Maharaj of Sakori,* which introduces a new and thought-provoking perception of Sai Baba.[38] His material was first drafted in 1967, but only updated and published privately in 1985. Prior to Shepherd, the perennial question was whether Sai Baba was Hindu or Muslim, with most of the secondary writers emphasizing the Hindu interpretation. Shepherd was the first author to question this Hindu bias and to redefine the broad 'Muslim' category, dividing it into the orthodox Islamic law or *sharia* and *Sufi* mysticism. By definition, an Islamic mystic is a *Sufi*, and as Sai Baba was a Muslim mystic, he was perforce a *Sufi*. Shepherd observes many links between Sai Baba and the strong *Sufi* tradition in the Deccan. He notes that since his death, the saint has been totally embraced by the Hindus and that in the process the Muslim minority in Shirdi has been eclipsed.[39] He feels that Narasimhaswami was one of those responsible for perpetrating this process of Hinduization. While most of his arguments concerning Sai Baba's *Sufi* connections are strong, he provides very little corroboration from the Sai Baba literature itself. For example, there is no evidence that he read Dabholkar's *Sri Sai Saccarita* nor that he knew Marathi or the Maharashtrian *Bhakti* tradition. In fact, no bibliography was given with his monograph.

Since 1918, there has built up a large body of testimonial literature attesting to the veracity of Sai Baba's promises. Known as the 'Eleven Promises of Sai Baba', these have now become a part of the popular hagiography surrounding the saint, and can be found in many of the books on Sai Baba. The full text is given in Appendix A. More current experiences are documented in popular books such as *Sai Baba the Master*[40] and *Ambrosia in Shirdi*[41], large sections of which are composed of devotees' testimonials. Acharya E. Bharadwaja's book, *Sai Baba the Master*, was first published in 1978 and contains new information from research undertaken by the author. He became a Sai Baba devotee through some personal experiences which he relates in the book, and these experiences sparked his interest in writing about the saint. He talked to many of Sai Baba's old devotees and their families, and, since he did not know Marathi, he had many of the back issues of the *Shri Sai Leela* journals translated for him. In his book he reviews the literature and refutes some of the information in earlier biographies. One chapter reviews all the spiritual personalities associated with Sai Baba, whom he terms 'offshoots' of Sai Baba. This is followed by a large section of testimonies from individuals who experienced the truth of the 'promise' of Sai Baba that he would be present to help his devotees from the tomb.[42] I attempted to get in touch with this author when I was in India, and was sorry to learn that he has passed away.

Ambrosia in Shirdi, written and published in 1984 by Ramalingaswamy of Shirdi, relates numerous experiences given by devotees who received help from Sai Baba both before his *mahasamadhi* in 1918 and since. This book also provides a quasi-travel guide for pilgrims to the significant Sai Baba memorial sites in and around the Samadhi Mandir and Shirdi village. He describes the daily *pujas*, rituals and festivals celebrated in Shirdi, which today are all Hindu. This book appears to be sponsored by the Shirdi Sri Sai Baba Sansthan which clearly promotes a Hindu interpretation of Sai Baba.

S. Gopala Krishna Murthy's *Understanding Shirdi Sai Baba*, published in 1977,[43] is not substantially different from the mainstream Hindu-focused biographies mentioned earlier. His style of presentation is to take topics and discuss Sai Baba under different headings.

An important booklet was published in October 1986, in commemoration of the 68th Anniversary of the physical passing away of Sai Baba. This is entitled *Sai Baba: The Perfect Master*, and is edited by D.N. Irani.[44] It is invaluable because it collects together many of the references made to Sai Baba by Meher Baba, the Parsi God-man who was himself known as Avatar Meher Baba. Scattered among his writings he often referred to Sai Baba in *Sufi* terms, as a 'Perfect master' or *qutb* which literally means an axis, pole or pillar around which the universe spins, used here in a spiritual context. He places Sai Baba at the head of a spiritual hierarchy of five Perfect Masters. It also contains excerpts from books about Meher Baba, which refer to the Shirdi sage. Meher Baba presented an altogether different view of Sai Baba from that of the Hindu authors, seeing him as a *Sufi* and a member of an elevated Islamic hierarchy of saints who had come with an urgent spiritual mission for this age. This opinion dovetails with material revealed in the *Saibaba MS*, given later in Part II.

Two more recent biographies on Sai Baba have been published, even since research was started on this book. However, like the three primary source books by Dabholkar, Gunaji and Narasimhaswami, these new books do not address the issue of the Hindu gloss on Sai Baba or his obvious Muslim *Sufi* orientation. The first, published in 1991, is entitled *Sai Baba of Shirdi: A Unique Saint* by M.V. Kamath and V.B. Kher, and is a welcome addition to the more scholarly secondary literature.[45] The co-authors are both qualified to write on Sai Baba of Shirdi: Kamath as a distinguished journalist, now retired; and Kher as a historian and researcher of many years on various aspects of the history surrounding Sai Baba. The latter has had numerous articles published in the *Shri Sai Leela* journal pertaining to the search for factual and historical data surrounding Sai Baba (a list can be found in the bibliography). Kamath and Kher entertain the possibility - while not striving to prove it - of Sai Baba being a *Sufi*, and of his having had the guidance of a *Sufi* master.[46] The two authors do not use Dabholkar's text for such a hypothesis but rely on Sharan Anand's biography and on Kher's personal acquaintance with the latter before he passed away. Unlike other versions of the story in which the young Sai Baba was placed in the care of a Hindu *guru* named Venkusha, their version follows the testimony of Sharan Anand that he left home at the young age of eight in the company of an unknown and unnamed *Sufi faqir*. According to Sharan Anand, Sai Baba found his *guru* in the traveller's rest house or *chavadi* in Shirdi, and declares that Sai Baba told him personally, 'My *guru*'s (master's) name is Roshan Sha Mian.'[47] *Shah Miyan* is a typical *Sufi* title of respect. In their assessment of Sai Baba's range of Muslim and *Sufi* knowledge, considering Abdul's evidence that Sai Baba could recite the *suras* of the *Qur'an*, Kamath and Kher conclude in their book, 'that he was indeed a disciple of a learned *fakir* [*sic*] for the best part of twelve years and learnt much from his master, during that period, without the aid of books and through sheer memory'.[48] In a personal communication by letter in 1993 with the author, V. B. Kher wrote: 'I have been pondering for a long time over the problem of the *guru* of Sai Baba. I have revised my earlier opinion and finally come to the conclusion that a *Sufi* Divine was the *guru* of Sai Baba. The name of the *Sufi* Divine is not known'.

Antonio Rigopoulos has recently published (1993) his 1987 Ph.D. thesis, under the title *The Life and Teachings of Sai Baba of Shirdi*. This work is a comprehensive biography and compilation of known facts. Although Rigopoulos acknowledges the saint's Muslim *Sufi* aspect, he does not pursue it, and never academically questions the obvious Hindu bias in his assessment and interpretation of Sai Baba. He has been content to follow the line of the previous biographers, Dabholkar, Gunaji and Narasimhaswami. Furthermore, he has actually contributed further to the Hindu gloss on Sai Baba, for in his central thesis he uses the broad categories of the Hindu path to liberation, namely love - *bhakti*, knowledge - *jnana* and action - *karma* as chapter headings, in his interpretation of the life and miracles of Sai Baba. Rigopoulos did not use Dabholkar's Marathi *Sri Sai Saccarita,* which, as indicated earlier in this chapter, differs substantially from Gunaji's English adaptation, from which he quotes profusely.

What Researchers Say on Sri Shirdi Sai Baba, by Ruhela (1994), reviews forty writers and researchers on Sai Baba, from

Das Ganu's devotional works at the turn of the century, to Rama Rao's article in a souvenir publication in 1994. Although it purports to be an academic endeavor, from a scholarly point of view it is very imprecise in its research, not giving sufficient detail with regard to: original dates of publication; original language and translations; biographies of the contributors; other books written by the contributors; current availability of these books; or the details of additions and changes made to revised editions. The material is listed and discussed chronologically by year of publication, not always accurately, and unfortunately makes no distinction between major contributions and minor works. Ruhela quotes hagiographical stories as fact, and information given by Sathya Sai Baba about Shirdi Sai Baba without any qualification. Ruhela makes an extraordinary statement at the end of his piece on Das Ganu: 'Das Ganu's findings have stood the test of time; all these are today believed to be cent per cent true by all Sai devotees and researchers on Baba's divine life.'[49] However, current books such as those by Bharadwaja, Kamath and Kher and Rigopoulos seriously question the validity of many of Das Ganu's statements.[50] Ruhela's conclusions are therefore not supported by the recent literature on the subject. Lastly, Ruhela does not deal at all with the issue of the apparent Hindu gloss given to Sai Baba.

The author, in recent field research, obtained a manuscript of Sai Baba's instruction and teaching based on the *Qur'an*. The notebook has been designated the *Saibaba MS,* as it records Sai Baba's teachings and sayings, as taught to his disciple Abdul, and noted down by him. The *Saibaba MS* confirms Sai Baba's familiarity with both Sufism and Islam.

Organization of Material

The book is organized into three parts. Part I places Sai Baba as a mystic within the context of the rich history of mysticism in the area known today as Maharashtra. In the past, this western part of India was known as the Deccan, and the medieval mystics formed two distinct branches - the *Bhakti Movement* and *Deccani Sufis*. Basic information tend to be the format in this part, linking Sai Baba with these traditions, out of which a more informed discussion can emerge in the later parts. Part II examines an essential element of Sufism known as the *tariqat* - the *Sufi* path, comparing it with the life and teaching of Sai Baba. It also introduces evidence for the assertion that Sai Baba knew a great deal more about Islam and Sufism than has hitherto been uncovered. Part III introduces a new perspective on the life of Sai Baba, and describes how he has been so positively embraced by the Hindus that unwittingly he has been given a Hindu gloss. The extensive influence of the contemporary Godman Sri Sathya Sai Baba, who claims to be the reincarnation of Shirdi Sai, is also examined.

Chapter One opens with an overview of the life of the nineteenth-century saint, Sai Baba of Shirdi, in order to refresh the reader's memory, or for those new to the subject it serves as a general introduction to the sage, and also highlights some of the points at issue. Chapter Two introduces the reader to the mysticism of Islam, termed Sufism, and introduces key points of its teaching pointing out their similarity to incidents in the life and teaching of Sai Baba. Chapter Three gives information on the area of western India known as the state of Maharashtra, formerly known as the Bombay Presidency, and locates significant places mentioned in the Sai Baba story, together with the rich spiritual history of the Deccan. Chapter Four isolates and collects the numerous hints and subtle references to the *Sufi*-Muslim aspects of Sai Baba, even though his biographies were written by Hindus largely ignorant of the tenets of Sufism. An amazing picture begins to emerge. Chapter Five zeroes in on the poet-saints of the medieval Bhakti Movement, and the specifically Maharashtrian deities, Vitthala and Dattatreya, who impact the lives of the devotees of Sai Baba in Shirdi, and are referred to in the biographies. Even in his lifetime, Sai Baba was recognized as an incarnation of Lord Dattatreya. Chapter Six examines the precedent of *Sufi*s and Muslims who were minorities in a Hindu environment in the Deccan in previous centuries, and like Sai Baba, they accommodated their message for the Hindu majority. These include the renowned *Sufi* poet-saints of Maharashtra who sang and wrote about the *Sufi* path to God-realization but have not hitherto been translated into English, as well as the popular Nizari Isma'ili sect centred in Bombay. Chapter Seven briefly notes the ideas and concepts that the *Bhakti movement* and Sufism had in common, to illustrate how close these two mystic movements were in reality - although couched in a different cultural medium and language. Chapter Eight discusses two nineteenth-century *Sufi* contemporaries of Sai Baba, Hazrat Babajan and Tajuddin Baba, pointing out their similarities.

Part II opens with Chapter Nine which looks specifically at the seven way-stations and ten states known as *maqamat* and *ahwal* of the *Sufi Tariqat* or path, and comparisons are drawn with incidents in the life and teachings of Sai Baba. This chapter may be regarded as the crux of the book, for the argument for Sai Baba's *Sufi* status is clinched here. Chapter Ten discusses the *faqir* Abdul, Sai Baba's long time disciple and servant, and introduces his Urdu notes taken while reading the *Qur'an* sitting at the feet of Sai Baba. Chapter Eleven presents a literal English translation of this Urdu notebook which, because Sai Baba is the inspiration behind the words, is referred to herein as the *Saibaba MS*. Chapter Twelve presents some observations on this manuscript in order to clarify some issues. Chapter Thirteen concludes that, whether intentionally or unintentionally, there has been a significant Hindu gloss given to the memory of Sai Baba, who has been warmly embraced by the Hindus. This books seeks only to redress the balance. The penultimate Chapter Fourteen details the important contribution of the contemporary Godman, Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Finally, Chapter Fifteen draws all the threads together to arrive at a fresh and comprehensive view of the enigmatic saint of Shirdi, *Hazrat* Sai Baba.

NOTES

1. LSB, I:69.
2. Mani Sahukar, *Sai Baba: The Saint of Shirdi*, 2nd ed. (Bombay: Somaiya Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1971), p. 14.
3. One doctoral thesis written for the University of Venice in 1987 has already been published under the title *The Life and Teachings of Sai*

Baba of Shirdi, by Antonio Rigopoulos (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

4. This note-book manuscript has been designated the *Saibaba MS* for this book. It was mentioned in M.V. Kamath and V.B. Kher's book *Sai Baba of Shirdi: A Unique Saint*, but only a few small sections of Abdul's notebook had been translated.
5. Grammatically the Arabic word should be given in the singular *wali*, but in Maharashtra the plural *awliya* is invariably used to describe a *Sufi* saint. It is also spelt *aulia* or *auliya* in Marathi and in Sai literature.
6. Abu Nasr al-Sarraj, *The Kitab al-Luma 'fi't-tasawwuf*, ed. and trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (London: Luzac & Co., 1914), p. 2.
7. LSB, III:152.
8. Govind Raghunath Dabholkar, *Sri Sai Saccarita* (Shirdi: Shri Sai Baba Sansthan, 1929), hereafter referred to by the abbreviation SS.
9. SS, 2:76
10. Acharya E. Bharadwaja, trans. *Sree Guru Charitra* by Gangadhar Saraswati (Ongole: Sai Baba Mission, 1987).
11. SS, 38:30. Dabholkar's family tradition as a Saraswat Brahman would however allow him to eat fish.
12. Nagesh Vasudev Gunaji, *Shri Sai Satcharita or the Wonderful Life and Teachings of Shri Sai Baba: Adapted from the Original Marathi Book by Hemadpant* [G.R. Dabholkar], 13th ed. (Bombay: Shri Sai Baba Sansthan, 1987), hereafter referred to by the abbreviation SSG. The word *charita* should more correctly be spelt *charitra*, meaning 'life-story' but this error has never been corrected, except on the inner title page of the 13th edition, published in 1987. It remained as *charita* on the hard cover of the book.
13. The monthly '*Shri Sai Leela*' journal was for many years a small modest booklet. Recently it has branched out and become a larger, more glossy issue, featuring coloured photographs.
14. SSG, pp. 24-5.
15. SSG, p. 202.
16. This is how she describes herself on the cover of her book. 'Parsi' is an alternate term for Zoroastrian, particularly in Western India.
17. Perin S. Bharucha, *Sai Baba of Shirdi* (Shirdi: Shri Sai Baba Sansthan, 1980), Preface.
18. Satya Pal Ruhela, *What Researchers Say on Sri Shirdi Sai Baba* (Faridabad: Sai Age Publications, 1994).
19. SSS, 11:146-8, SSG, p. 66.
20. SSG, p. 150.
21. See DE, p. 119: *Bhakta Lilamrita*, chapters 31-33; *Santa Kathamrita*, Chapter 57; *Bhakti Saramrita*, chapters 26, 65-67.
22. Das Ganu, *Shri Sainath - Stavan Manjari* (A Humble Tribute of Praise to Shri Sainath), trans. from the Marathi by Zarine Taraporevala and ed. by

Indira Kher (Shirdi: Shri Sai Baba Sansthan, 1987); also *The Blossom of Praise to Shri Sainath,* English translation in verse of *Shri Sainath Stavan Manjari* of Das Maharaj originally in Marathi Ovimetre, trans. D.Y. Biniwale, ed. M.B. Nimbalkar (Rajahmundry: Oum Sri Sai Ram Adhyatmika Chaitanya Kendrum, 1988).

23. Abdul Ghani Munsiff, "Hazrat Sai Baba of Shirdi," *Meher Baba Journal* 1 (1938-39), 46-56.
24. Ganesh Shrikrishna Khaparde, *Shirdi Dairy of The Hon'ble G.S. Khaparde* (Shirdi: Shri Sai Baba Sansthan, n.d.). Although there is no date of publication in my copy of the book, Ruhela indicates that the date of publication was 1918, *What Researchers Say on Sri Shirdi Sai Baba*, p. 16.
25. M.V. Pradhan, *Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi (A Glimpse of Indian Spirituality)* (Shirdi: Shri Sai Baba Sansthan, 1988).
26. Sai Sharan Anand, *Shri Sai Baba* [Gujarati], 6th ed., (1966); trans. into Marathi by V.B. Kher with six research papers (Bombay: Dinapushpa Prakashan, 1982). The English version of *Shri Sai Baba*, also translated by V.B. Kher, was published by Sterling Press in New Delhi in May 1997. V.B. Kher kindly lent the author the unpublished manuscript of the English translation for her research.
27. Sai Sharan Anand, *Shri Sai the Superman* (Bombay: Shirdi Sansthan Publication, 1962).
28. B.V. Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences of Shri Sai Baba,* 3 pts. (Madras: All India Sai Samaj (Regd.), 1942); later published as H.H. Narasimhaswamiji, *Devotees' Experiences of Sri Sai Baba*, parts I, II & III (Hyderabad: Akhanda Sainama Sapthaha Samithi, 1989), hereafter referred to by the abbreviation DE. In this book the Hyderabad version is used. Although Narasimhaswami's initials are B.V., sometimes H.H. is used as an honorific meaning His Holiness. Narasimhaswami was the founder president of the All India Sai Samaj which was established in Mylapore, Madras in 1939 (Ruhela, *What Researchers Say on Sri Shirdi Sai Baba,* p. 25.). This Samaj would be the publisher of all his books. He was also influential in the building of a Sai Baba Temple in Madras.
29. H.H. Narasimhaswami, *Sri Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings*, 6th ed. (rpt. Madras: All India Sai Samaj (Regd.), 1986, hereafter referred to by the abbreviation CS.
30. In her 'Preface to the Second Edition', Mani Sahukar writes that this was first published in 1952 by Hind Kitabs Ltd. which was by then no longer in business.
31. Rao Saheb H.P. Mehta, *The Spiritual Symphony of Shree Sainath of Shirdi* (Baroda 1952).
32. Arthur Osborne, *The Incredible Sai Baba: The Life and Miracles of a Modern-day Saint* (Calcutta: Orient Longmans (Private) Limited, 1957; London: Rider and Co., 1958; Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1973).

33. Osborne, *The Incredible Sai Baba*, p. 23.
34. B.V. Narasimhaswami, *Life of Sai Baba*, 4 vols. (Madras: All India Sai Samaj (Regd.), 1955-56), hereafter referred to by the abbreviation LSB.
35. B.V. Narasimhaswami, *Self-Realization or The Life and Teachings of Bhagawan Sri Ramana Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: T.N. Venkataraman, 1953).
36. LSB, III:160.
37. Sai Padananda, *Sri Narasimha Swamiji: Apostle of Sri Sai Baba, the Saint of Shirdi* (Madras: All India Sai Samaj (Regd.), 1973).
38. Kevin R.D. Shepherd, *Gurus Rediscovered: Biographies of Sai Baba of Shirdi and Upasani Maharaj of Sakori* (Cambridge: Anthropographia Publications, 1985). Shepherd is very opinionated in this book. For example he summarily dismisses Narasimhaswami as an opportunist, whose only interest was in elevating himself through writing the biographies of holy men.
39. Shepherd, *Gurus Rediscovered*, p. 1.
40. E. Bharadwaja, *Sai Baba the Master*, 4th ed. (Ongole, A.P.: Sree Guru Paduka Publications, 1993).
41. Ramalingaswamy, *Ambrosia in Shirdi: A Book Never Before* (Shirdi: Ramalingaswamy, 1984).
42. Bharadwaja also performed a great service in translating the fifteenth century Marathi work *Sree Guru Charitra* into English, publishing it in 1987, two years before he passed away in 1989. This work, which is of particular interest to us as it served as the model for Dabholkar's *Sri Sai Saccarita*, details the lives of two medieval incarnations of the deity Dattatreya, of whom Sai Baba is also held to be an incarnation.
43. S. Gopala Krishna Murthy, *Understanding Shirdi Sai* (Hyderabad: Sri Shirdi Sai Prema Mandiramu, 1977).
44. D.N. Irani, ed. *Sai Baba: The Perfect Master* (Poona: Meher Era Publications, 1986).
45. M.V. Kamath and V.B. Kher, *Sai Baba of Shirdi: A Unique Saint* (Bombay: Jaico Publishing House, 1991). Kamath and Kher dismiss Dabholkar's *Sri Sai Saccarita* as 'a 'religious' text... and a legend rather than historical truth,' p. 74.
46. Kamath and Kher, *A Unique Saint*, p. 81.
47. Sharan Anand, *Sri Sai the Superman*, p. 17. A more accurate spelling would be Roshan Shah Miya.
48. Kamath and Kher, *A Unique Saint*, p. 41.
49. Ruhela, *What Researchers Say*, p. 15.
50. Bharadwaja, *Sai Baba the Master*, discusses this more fully in his Appendix VI - Baba's Antecedents, pp. 370-71.

Part I

Sai Baba and Maharashtrian Mysticism

CHAPTER ONE

An Overview of the Life of Sai Baba

Until a decade or two ago, the name 'Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi' would probably have been unknown to the average Westerner, or noted by the historian to refer to a somewhat obscure Indian saint whose shrine was tucked away in a remote rural hamlet, known as Shirdi in the Ahmadnagar Taluk in the State of Maharashtra in Western India. He might appear to be just one of any number of nineteenth century holy men, rarely mentioned in Western reference books, who had a staunch local following in his lifetime, but about whom there was little accurate historical documentation. One might expect therefore that the name 'Sai Baba' would be added to the long list of Maharashtrian *bhakti* saints, and that in time his memory would fade. However, this scenario is far from the present-day reality, for Sai Baba of Shirdi is attracting a wave of popular devotion, being revered not only locally in Maharashtra, but increasingly his spiritual reputation is growing throughout India - and is now spreading around the world. Sai Baba is being accepted more and more by his ardent devotees, not merely as a God-realized saint, but as the very embodiment of Divinity itself.

Since the mid-1970's Sai Baba has increasingly become the focus of attention not only of devotees, but also of authors, academics, researchers and even film-makers. The village of Shirdi has become a very popular place of pilgrimage, with the Sai Baba shrine known by Hindus as his *samadhi* or by Muslims as his *dargah*, acting as a magnet for those seeking help. A.R.Shinde, a supervisor with the Shirdi Sansthan, remembers that as recently as 1950, 100-150 devotees arriving for a festival was considered a rush day.[1] Today, Shirdi has become a boom town, with year-round visitors, boasting thirty newly built hotels in the past two years, including 'three and four-star establishments', catering to a floating population of about 25,000 pilgrims, which rises to 35-40,000 at major festivals.[2] Written several years ago, this statement is already far out of date. The enigmatic figure of Sai Baba, in his characteristic seated pose with his right leg resting on his left knee (*see* Plate 4), is used as a talisman all over Maharashtra. His picture is frequently seen in taxi cabs, in small altar niches inside shops, in wayside shrines and even in chalk pavement art (*see* Plates 5 & 6). Prayers are regularly addressed to him with every expectation of help and protection and of an immediate intervention on behalf of the devotee.

The pan-Indian revival of interest in Sai Baba in the last few years, and the transformation of Shirdi, from a sleepy village at the turn of the century into a major pilgimage centre today, attracting the largest crowds in the state of Maharashtra, is due to a variety of factors. Firstly, it is the experience of innumerable devotees that prayer to Sai Baba yields tangible worldly results, in such practical matters as healing of disease, employment, money and progeny for childless couples, etc., as well as in the more subtle areas of transformation of character and esoteric benefits. This pragmatic factor should not be under-valued as a factor in the phenomenal growth of popularlity of Sai Baba. Secondly, there has been a proliferation of books, journals, films, videos and *bhajan* audio-cassettes which are reaching vast numbers of people, raising popular awareness of Sai Baba. In the mid 1970's a Marathi film *Shirdi Che Sai Baba* was made on the life of Sai Baba, and subsequently a Hindi movie came out entitled *Shirdi Ke Sai Baba* starring the popular actor Manoj Kumar, and these movies have greatly increased public awareness of the saint. The Hindi movie was also shown in 1988 on Doordarshan, the national Indian television station, an event which further heightened Sai Baba's popularity. Since that time a further movie entitled *In Praise of the Saint of Shirdi* has been released in Hindi, although none of these movies have been released with English sub-titles as yet. Finally, perhaps the most influential factor is the God-man of South India, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, who has declared that he is the reincarnation of Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi. Today this connection draws thousands of Sathya Sai devotees annually to the Shirdi shrine. Now 73 years old, Bhagavan Sathya Sai Baba has consistently claimed since age 14 that his 'previous body' was Sai Baba, a saint who was little-known at the time and whose abode was located hundreds of miles away from Sathya Sai Baba's place of birth in Andhra Pradesh.

Sai Baba of Shirdi was famous in Maharashtra as a miracle-worker, and in the last few decades of his life people flocked to see him to receive his blessings, referred to as 'taking his *darsan'*, and to request his help. He held audience or *darbar* twice a day from his *masjid* or small Muslim *mosque.* On special occasions Sai Baba himself would cook huge quantities of food including meat, most often lamb, in the manner of a *Sufi* feast termed a *bhandara,* to be distributed to all present. Imambai Chota Khan remembers that Sai Baba occasionally would prepare a recipe of *kichdi* of mutton, rice and dal and would distribute it to everyone.[3] Shirdi Sai had the reputation of being clairvoyant and demonstrated many miraculous powers, such as healing the sick and restoring eyesight, taking upon himself people's afflictions, affecting events at a distance, appearing in dreams, materializing *udi* or holy ash, water and food, and being seen in two places at once. He was even known to have control over the elements, preventing storms and controlling fire and water. Visitors and devotees alike brought all manner of food as offerings called *naivedya*, as well as money gifts known as *daksina*, all of which were distributed among those present. He acted on the conviction that if he first fulfilled people's desires for worldly boons, eventually they would come to seek the guidance that he had to offer for their spiritual progress.[4]

Sai Baba shunned any kind of regular ritual, Hindu or Muslim, for the first fifty or more years of his life in Shirdi.[5] However, *namaz* - the five daily orthodox prayers of the Muslims, *al-fatiha* - the recitation of the opening chapter of the *Qur'an*, and the 'seven oft-repeated verses'[6] from the *Qur'an* - were said intermittently in his *masjid* along with other rituals at Muslim festival times.

According to devotees, Baba occasionally used to pronounce *fatia* [sic][7], and it is also recorded that 'he told *Fakirs* [sic] to utter *Fatya* [sic] when Moslems made offerings'.[8] Sai Baba liked devotional singing, and 'people would do also *moulu* every day, during day time before Baba at the mosque, and *kowali [qawwali]* in the morning with *tabla* and *sarangi*.'[9] On the other hand, in the *Saibaba MS* (to be discussed in Part II) he says that when God is enthroned in the heart - what is the need for all the Islamic rituals, five times a day *namaz*, fasting, pilgrimage to Mecca or prostration.[10] Dabholkar, using the Islamic terms, refers to *namaz* and *fatiha* being recited, and mentions the festival of Moharram, in his Marathi *Sri Sai Saccarita*. Sai Baba allowed the *tabut* or *tazia,* which is a colourful replica of the coffin of the great martyrs of Islam, to be worshipped in his *masjid* for a few days. Khan told Narasimhaswami in 1938 that 'Moslems go for *idga* to this mosque even now and they did so in Baba's time also.' However, no Hindu *pujas* were ever conducted there until the very last years of his life, and then only in the worship of Sai Baba himself. No Hindu deities were ever worshipped within his *masjid*, although he sent money and materials for the repair of Hindu temples in the Shirdi village, such as the Maruti Temple, Shani Temple, Shankar-Parvati Temple and the temple of the village folk-deity Khandoba.[11] Hari Vinayak Sathe told Narasimhaswami in his interview in 1936, that on one occasion he had asked Sai Baba if he could do *puja* to him as Mahadeva or Shiva on *Shivaratri* night, but Baba refused permission. Nevertheless, he and Megha took some bilva leaves to the steps of the mosque at midnight and started to do a silent *puja* with sandalpaste. But Sai Baba awoke from sleep and was exceedingly angry, hurling wild abuse which roused the whole village.[12] All his life he practiced the discipline of a poor *faqir*, begging for his food and living the austere celibate life of a renunciate with few possessions. Although *Sufi faqirs* in general were not required to be celibate, Sai Baba himself practiced celibacy and never married. He would have no association with women regarding all as either mothers or sisters. However, Abdul, his *Sufi* disciple and servant, married and had a family, and his descendants still live in Shirdi.

Although Sai Baba is consistently described as a Muslim *faqir* throughout his biographies, many people today regard Sai Baba as Hindu. At the time of his death in 1918, it had already become a truism that he was 'neither Hindu nor Muslim'. Dabholkar may have perpetrated this ambiguity by saying, 'If you call him a Hindu then he appears to be a *yavana* or Muslim. Call him a *yavana*, he has all the attributes of a Hindu.'[13] Assertions such as 'no one knew whether he was a Hindu or Muslim', as reported in the 1961 *Census of India*, became common.[14] It has even became fashionable in academic articles to class others along with him as 'saints with no definite Hindu or Muslim affiliation like Sai Baba of Shirdi'.[15] Even a recent researcher from Italy continues the ambiguity saying, '...today people still debate whether he was a Hindu or a Muslim'.[16] In recent times there appears to have been great pressure from Hindu devotees to have Sai Baba and his temple declared legally and officially Hindu. In 1995 a legal question was posed as to whether a Sai Baba temple could be declared exclusively Hindu, and the issue ended up going all the way to the Supreme Court of India. The Andhra Pradesh Government sought the Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi temple at Chanderghat, Hyderabad, to be declared a Hindu religious place. The Supreme Court dismissed the appeal however, and the ruling came down that it could not be held to be exclusively a Hindu Temple. The High Court held that:

> If a temple dedicated to Shirdi Sai Baba was to be treated as an exclusively Hindu temple, it would be a grave contradiction and negation of the composite religion of universal character which the saint had preached all his life". The High Court further noted that "Baba's philosophy was neither exclusively Hindu or Muslim or Christian. He believed that God was not bound by the fetters of caste, creed or religion. The Baba used to preach that God did not live in either a temple or a mosque.[17]

Both Hindus and Muslims bestowed titles upon Sai Baba during his lifetime reflecting his divine status in their own eyes and experience, such as the Muslim *awliya* meaning saint or more literally 'friend of God', *Hazrat* or Perfect master, as well as the Hindu designation *Samartha Sadguru* indicating a true or realised teacher and *avatar* - a divine descent or incarnation of God on earth. The choice of title would more often betray the devotee's own religious affiliation, as well as the currently perceived opinion of the religious background of Sai Baba. Dabholkar writes: 'We regarded him as an incarnation of God because he had all the signs of an *avatara*, but he used to say that he was just a slave of *Allah*'.

In Shirdi, Thursday is considered to be the day dedicated to one's *guru* and now it has become especially sacred to Sai Baba. Coincidentally or not, in the *Sufi* folk tradition Thursday is recognized as the day set aside to visit shrines. Based on my own observations visiting the Shri Sai Memorial in Delhi one Thursday evening, Shirdi Sai Baba devotees do set aside this day to visit the shrine dedicated to Sai Baba. At the same time, it was obvious that Sai Baba was being treated like a Hindu *avatar* of Vishnu in the manner of Rama or Krishna, as a continuous line of devotees passed in procession in front of the life-size statue from 5 pm until around 8 pm when the building was finally closed. While I was there listening to the devotional *bhajans* or songs being played, a constant stream of devotees paid their respects, offering flower garlands called *malas*, pieces of cloth to be blessed by being wrapped around the figure and received back again later, incense, coconuts and food to be blessed as *prasad*. Unless one knew otherwise, it would be easy to assume that the figure being worshipped there was a Hindu deity, rather than a comparatively recent *Sufi* saint.

The worship of Sai Baba of Shirdi has now been imported to where he has a growing number of followers, largely due to his connection with Sri Sathya Sai Baba. The *murti* of Sai Baba of Shirdi has been installed in the Vishnu Temple in Toronto, Canada, the official inauguration of which I had the privilege of attending in June 1992. There are two interesting and unusual facets to this installation, the first being that a temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu usually contains *murtis* only of Hindu deities - Ganesa, Rama, Krishna etc., with occasional statues of prominent but long-dead Vaisnava saints such as the Alvars or Chaitanya. As at the Delhi Memorial, Sai Baba is here being honoured and treated as a deity. An interesting observation is that in the Vishnu Temple in Toronto, Sai Baba's simple *Sufi* style of head covering of a white cloth wrapped around the head, depicted on the statue, is now obscured by an ornate crown on his head, placed by the Hindu devotees, thus transforming him into a Maharaj. Hindu devotees in Shirdi did indeed refer to Sai Baba as Sai Maharaj during his lifetime. Secondly, he was a Muslim who is now being honoured in a Hindu temple, albeit treated as a Hindu. It is apparent here that many Hindus do recognize and revere him as an *avatar*, and interpret his teaching in the light of traditional *bhakti* Hinduism, to the point where Sai Baba's shrine, and also his life and teaching, have been almost totally Hinduized. This important point is further taken up in Part III, with a chapter devoted to the Hindu interpretation of Sai Baba.

While Sai Baba was claimed by both Muslims and Hindus, his core approach to God-realization had a distinct Islamic stance, and he never taught specifically Hindu doctrines and rituals. According to Dabholkar, Sai Baba never prescribed any yoga postures or regulation of breath called *pranayama* to his devotees, nor did he blow any sacred verses into their ears, or give instruction on occult rituals or symbols known as *mantra, tantra* or *yantra*.[18] To a Hindu woman, who was apparently willing to fast until death in order to persuade Sai Baba to give her a *mantra,* he refused saying: 'I am not a *guru* who whispers *mantra* in the ear. Our religious tradition is different (*amaca dharma nirala ahe*).'[19] Here he is emphatically declaring that he is not a Hindu but is following a different path, albeit with the same goal of God-realization. Sai Baba further admits that his *guru* did not teach this way, so likewise he cannot give a *mantra*, although it would be normal for a Hindu to ask his *guru* for a *mantra* to aid meditation, as this is regarded as an important means of spiritual progress. On the other hand, Khan told Narasimhaswami that Sai Baba did instruct the Muslim Anwar Khan to recite the *Bismillah* from the *Fatiha* (first chapter of the *Qur'an*) 101 times at midnight, like a *mantra*.[20] Thus, even though the biographies and devotees' accounts were authored by Hindus who were largely ignorant of Islamic ideas and practices, they could not totally ignore his different non-Hindu approach. Sai Baba has however, been almost completely assimilated and reinterpreted by the Hindu community. Sai Sharan Anand's statement reveals his obvious Hindu bias when he writes:

> Hindu devotees of Baba particularly Brahmins and other *dwijas* (literally the twice born or upper caste Hindus), believe that if Baba had donned Mohammaden garb and adopted some Mohammaden ways of worship....it was for the purpose of killing or removing the wrong interpretation of the Veda and drawing attention to the truth that everything - all without exception - is Brahman.[21]

Sai Baba's Muslim affiliation is obviously being rationalized here quite vigorously, almost to the point of denial.

Currently, there are a number of recent attempts at writing a biography of Sai Baba on the market. Writing such a biography is difficult due to the paucity of reliable material before the turn of the century when he would have been 62 years of age, as well as Sai Baba's own reticence at revealing personal details surrounding his birth, early life and training. This book is not intended to add to those already there. However, for the reader not familiar with Sai Baba a composite overview is included, which, while not being fully comprehensive, covers the key events of his life. I also highlight from a *Sufi* perspective certain points whose significance has not previously been understood. These indicate that Sai Baba was a *Sufi* by training, and that he accommodated his message to the influx of Hindu followers during his last decade. The overview also provides a context for the reader to understand the arguments presented in this book. Much of the biographical data is mixed with hagiography and legend, and with each retelling some points become elaborated, and some omitted. The general review given here is compiled from the numerous accounts available. The points where there is still apparent controversy will be noted.

Composite Overview of the Life of Sai Baba

Sai Baba today is generally referred to in the English-speaking world as a 'saint', particularly as 'The Saint of Shirdi'. The word 'saint' is strictly speaking a Christian term, but in India it has come to embrace all the innuendos of a Hindu or *Sufi* Enlightened One, miracle-worker, spiritual master and guide, without the overtones of Christian canonization. In the Muslim context, an individual is termed a saint if he can relieve distress or provide human needs through supernatural intervention and magical powers.[22] 'Saint' is often used to translate the Arabic, Persian and Urdu terms, *wali*, (pl. *awliya), murshid, darvish, faqir, Sufi,* and *pir*. Each of these also carry further shades of meaning and indicate a diversity of roles, which will become apparent in the discussion in the rest of the book. While *wali*, with its plural *awliya*, is the term most generally translated as saint, in Maharashtra *awliya* is commonly used in the singular in place of *wali*. Thus Sai Baba is often called an *awliya* (sometimes spelt *aulia*). Very little is actually known about the life-history of Sai Baba until his last decade. Throughout his life he was simply known as a Muslim *faqir*. A Muslim is one who follows the religion of Islam as revealed to the Prophet Mohammad, and literally means 'one who submits or surrenders to the Will of God'.[23] A variation on the term is the Persian word *Musulman*, which was in common usage in nineteenth-century India. The term *faqir* is a synonym, along with the term *Sufi*, for a member of the *tasawwuf*, the mystic branch of Islam, which has come to be known more generally as Sufism. The word *faqir* comes from the root *faqr,* which literally means 'poor', thus indicating the holy poverty of one who though materially poor, desires only spiritual wealth. *Faqirs* are often independent wandering mendicants. Even Sai Baba's name is not a name in the accepted sense, but is coined from the Persian expression *sa'ih* used to designate this type of itinerant *Sufi faqir* who lived away from crowds in the forest.[24] According to Bharadwaja, 'many wandering *faqirs* or dervishes were called Sai'.[25] Furthermore, in the Indian *Sufi* tradition, *Baba* is an honorary title, as was given to Sai Baba's *Sufi* contemporary Tajuddin Baba, or to Baba Farid, the famous Chishti Sheikh Farid-ud-din Ganj Shakar (he whose spiritual eminence is likened to a treasure-house of sugar), and comprises part of the name by which many *faqirs* are known. *Baba* is also a common Hindu Marathi expression, meaning father, and is also used in the Punjab as evidenced by Guru Nanak, the well-known founder of the Sikh tradition, who is also known as Baba Nanak.

Sai Baba's association with Sufism is established very early in his life-story, when we are told that he was abandoned at birth by Brahman parents, and taken by a *Sufi faqir* and his wife and brought up by them.[26] This is a hagiographical account told and recorded by Hindus, supported by Sai Baba's own declarations of being a Brahman. One might argue that this is a classic case of devotees wanting to Hinduize the saint by inventing a hagiography of a Brahman birth. But Mhalsapati, the local priest at the Khandoba temple and long-time devotee and friend of Sai Baba, who had the distinction of sleeping in the company of Sai Baba on alternate nights in the *chavadi* for 30 to 40 years, stated to Narasimhaswami that Sai Baba revealed late in life that his parents were *Brahmins* of Pathri.[27] Sai Baba said, "I was a Brahmin of Patri. When I was young my parents gave me away to a *fakir*".[28] He then went on to mention the names of many people from Pathri and made enquiries about them. While the statements of Sathya Sai Baba are not quoted and discussed extensively in this book, it is interesting to note that in a discourse given September 27, 1992, Sathya Sai Baba declared that Sai Baba was born in a poor Brahmin family in the village of Pathri in Aurangabad District.[29]

Thus according to the legend, Sai Baba was born to Brahmin parents at Pathri in the Nizam's Dominions. The date of birth that is given most frequently is 1838, although the precise year is impossible to verify independently from this distance in time.[30] He was abandoned at a very young age by his birth parents because they had already renounced worldly life and could not take care of him. He was found and raised by a childless *Sufi faqir* and his wife. Thus he was brought up as a Muslim, and he must have been initiated very early into the *Sufi* way by his guardian. This early influence must have been strong, for as he grew up Sai Baba discarded all thoughts of worldly pursuits in favour of the one-pointed goal of God-realization, to be achieved by leading a life of asceticism and practice of the intense love of *Allah*.[31] When the child was aged four or five, his *faqir* mentor died, and his wife, unable to cope, placed him with a *guru* called Venkusha at Selu, a village previously known as Sailu[32], located about fifteen kilometers north-west of Pathri in the Nizam's Dominions. Because of the similarity of the name Venkusha with Venkateswara, this *guru* is presumed to have been a devotee of Lord Venkateswara of Tirupati. It is never satisfactorily explained in the Hindu biographies why a Muslim *faqir*'s wife would choose to place her adopted boy with a Brahmin *guru*, particularly as there was often bitter Hindu/Muslim unrest at that time. The number of years he remained with 'Venkusha' varies according to the source, but he is said to have eventually left this place on this *guru*'s death and travelled to Shirdi. According to some versions of the hagiography, we are supposed to believe that Sai Baba had a *Sufi* guardian until age four, then he spent 'twelve years' under the care of a Hindu *guru*, and finally at age sixteen on his arrival in Shirdi, he was instantly recognizable as a Muslim *faqir*. This is not tenable, and all of the recent biographers and writers question this conclusion and agree that it is not credible.[33] Osborne suggests that the hagiographical 'twelve years' may have been symbolic language and twelve may be representative of a completed period, such as the twelve signs of the zodiac.[34] This interpretation also accords with Sathya Sai Baba's version which states: 'The boy grew up in Venkusha's home for some time. However, he was not inclined to stay there for long'.[35] Today the Hindu hagiographies conclude that these first four or five years with a *Sufi faqir* constitute the entire foundation for Sai Baba's life-long practice as a *faqir*, and furthermore that he sustained his *Sufi* identity despite 'twelve years' under the guidance of a Hindu *guru*.

Sai Baba is reported on one occasion to have said that the name of his *guru* was Venkusha of Selu, but did not reveal any further details about him.[36] Das Ganu was the first to link the Hindu deity Venkateswara of Tirupati with Venkusha, because of the similarity of the name to that of the deity. As a *kirtankar,* a singer of devotional songs often pertaining to the lives of saints, it was in Das Ganu's interest to find out the facts of Sai Baba's life, as he would for any other saint he wished to extol through his *kirtans*. In his songs he would weave stray references to Sai Baba's early life, with information supposedly gleaned on a field trip to Selu around the turn of the century. There he discovered that the Deshmukh or district Administrator of the region of Jintur Pargana was a noted spiritual Hindu called Gopal Rao Deshmukh, who also had the nickname of 'Venkusha'. So, without further inquiry, Das Ganu linked Sai Baba's *guru* Venkusha with the Hindu Deshmukh Venkusha, and identified them as the same person. He had written two chapters on Sai Baba which he put in his book *Bhaktisaramrit* as Chapters 52 and 53, and Sai Baba blessed this. But all his subsequent writings, including those concerning Venkusha, were written after Sai Baba passed away in 1918. Due to unquestioned acceptance of this story by the biographers, and its subsequent repetition by almost all of the secondary authors, this linkage has been invested with pseudo-legitimacy. However, in defence of Das Ganu, he never claimed to be a research historian. He was a *kirtankar* intent on singing the praises of Sai Baba, merely seeking to add interesting titbits to poetical songs extolling his *guru*'s life. There were a host of legendary tales surrounding the life-history of Gopal Rao Deshmukh that Das Ganu tapped into in order to add colour to his *kirtan*, and these have duly found their way into the biographies, where they are usually quoted in full however fantastic they may be. Kamath and Kher also come to the conclusion that Das Ganu's story is 'too fanciful to be believed', and that his stories are dubious for 'on his own admission Das Ganu got from Baba very few autobiographical details.'[37] A further confirmation that Das Ganu did not always research his facts well, is found in the testimony of Hari Vinayak Sathe who records that the account of his marriage was inaccurate, and that he was not consulted before Das Ganu wrote his *Bhaktalilamrit*.[38]

Even if Gopal Rao Deshmukh, also known as Babasaheb Subhedar of Sailu, was sufficiently eclectic to give the boy a *Sufi* training while giving other boys Hindu training, as has been suggested, this particular Gopal Rao Deshmukh mentioned by Das Ganu passed away in 1802, long before Sai Baba was born. The *saka* dates 1600-1723 of Gopal Kesavarao Deshmukh are clearly written on the wall of the Kesavarao Mandir in the town of Selu. These dates translate to Christian era dates *circa* 1678-1801. I witnessed this inscription myself during a field trip to Selu in 1990. The Subhedar family elders confirm these dates, and, in all probability, there was no connection whatever between Gopal Rao Deshmukh and Sai Baba. Nevertheless, the younger members of the Subhedar family today enjoy their tenuous association with Sai Baba, and in 1990 were enterprising enough to show me the bed in which Sai Baba is said to have slept! Kher, however, interviewing a sixth generation descendant of the Subhedar family, was shown private family records supporting this early death-date of 1801/2.[39] The family and descendants of Gopal Rao Deshmukh all concur that no interview or conversation ever took place between themselves and Das Ganu on his visit to Selu. An elaborate hagiography of Sai Baba's *guru* has, however, been built on Das Ganu's weak research and then merely repeated over and over by the majority of the secondary writers on Sai Baba. The Keshavarao Mandir in Selu has a painting on an interior wall of Sai Baba, which may be an attempt to establish a link with this hagiographical story. Strangely enough, Sai Baba in this painting, has the appearance of a *Sufi* divine (*see* front cover photograph).

Sai Baba's name was probably intertwined with the existing mythology surrounding Gopal Rao Deshmukh by those Hindus who felt it important to link the saint with a tradition of Hindu *gurus*.[40] Ironically Narasimhaswami, while subtly acknowledging the anomaly of Sai Baba's obvious *Sufi* appearance after supposedly having lived for twelve years with a Venkateswara *bhakta*, smoothes it away, concluding, 'So luckily the change [of *guru*] from *Faqir* to Venkusha [at age five] did not involve any serious change in Baba's method of progress'.[41] Rigopoulos rightly points out that it is quite improbable that Sai Baba could have acquired from his Sufi mentor such a thorough foundation of *Sufi* precepts at such a young age, to sustain him through twelve subsequent years with a Hindu *bhakta*.[42] Therefore, we may conclude that Sai Baba's *guru* was, in all probability, a simple pious *Sufi* scholar, who for some now unknown reason acquired the nickname Venkusha. *Shah,* which in Marathi transliteration is *sha* or *sa*, is a common title for a *Sufi* divine, and in Maharashtra there is the example of Shah Muni. Furthermore, Kulkarni cites in his study of the folklores of Marathwada, a *pir* called Bhikansha Baba.[43] If it is accepted that Sai Baba's *guru* was a Sufi *pir*, his name might have been Venku Shah, or alternatively spelt in Maharashtra Venku Sha or Sa.[44] Hari Vinayak Sathe told Narasimhaswami that while he was rebuilding the village wall, Baba told him his *Guru*'s tomb was close by and he says, 'he gave me his *Guru's* name. It ended with "*Shah*" or "*Sa*". I have forgotten the rest of the name.'[45] Thus, Sai Baba's *guru* may well have been such a *pir* or *faqir* accompanied by a young boy, later to be known as Sai Baba, when he left Pathri.

A *Sufi* saint who has recently been put forward as the guru of Sai Baba, is the nineteenth- century Saint Shah Waris Ali. This suggestion was put forward by B.K.Narayan in his 1995 publication, *Saint Shah Waris Ali and Sai Baba.* Although his work is primarily about Shah Waris Ali, he states that his colleague General Enayeth Habibullah confided to him that Sai Baba was the saint's disciple. He states that there were aged people who had knowledge of the relationship which existed between Sai Baba and Shah Waris Ali, and he promised to provide further information and evidence for him, but unfortunately he passed away before he could do so.[46] This is the extent of the claim, except that he goes on to quote from a book, *Life and Teachings of Sai Baba*, by Rajarshi Bala Sanyasi[47], about the story of a pious Muslim couple who while on pilgrimage, had a son in Jerusalem in 1858, whom they suggest was Sai Baba. However, it is well-accepted today that Sai Baba was born in 1838 in Pathri in the Nizam's Dominions. In any event, such books indicate that there was an awareness within the *Sufi* community of Sai Baba and his *Sufi* affiliations, and this is a source which unfortunately has gone largely untapped and unrecorded.

An alternate hypothesis is put forward in Part III, 'The Sathya Sai Baba Connection', that Venkusha was the same person as Venka Avadhuta, who befriended Sathya Sai Baba's grandfather, Sri Kondama Raju, and intimated to him that Lord Narayan would be born in the Raju family within his lifetime. In this case, Sathya Sai Baba's statement, that the young Sai 'was not inclined to stay long' with Venkusha, is possible. In this scenario, Venkusha disappears from the story, and as will be later discussed, he reappears in Puttaparthi at the turn of the century. Sai Baba arrived in Shirdi in 1854 looking like a *faqir*, so the intervening years must have been spent training with a *Sufi faqir* in the Aurangabad region. So, this leads us to Sai Sharan Anand's theory which may well be correct. If Sai Baba was age four or five when he was left by the *faqir*'s wife with Venkusha, and did not stay long, then after a few years, he may well have left with a wandering *Sufi faqir* at age seven or eight years old, and travelled along the Godavari river towards Paithan and Aurangabad.

Kamath and Kher, relying on Sai Sharan Anand's biography *Shri Sai Baba* which Kher translated from the original Gujarati[48], and Kher's personal communication with Swami Sharan Anand, aver that Sai Baba left Pathri when he was eight years old, in the company of a *Sufi faqir*, somewhere between 1848 and 1850.[49] Swami Sai Sharan Anand quotes what Sai Baba told him personally about his departure from Pathri, saying:

> This is what Baba said [unasked] to the writer. "I was only eight years old when I left my parents and came to

> the Ganges [Baba always named the Godavari as the Ganges]. Then I came to Shirdi."[50]

Thus, not only was Sai Baba significantly older in Sai Sharan Anand's version when he left Pathri, but his *Sufi* training would have continued after age eight, for up to eight more years, for he arrived in Shirdi when he was sixteen looking like a *faqir*. Sharan Anand says that the young Sai Baba travelled with his *faqir* mentor along the Godavari river to Paithan, the ancient capital of the Satavahanas, stayed for some time and then went to Aurangabad. All this area was part of the Nizam's dominions at this time. He stayed in the general area of Aurangabad where it is known that there existed a sizable *Sufi* community in the nineteenth century. Two *Sufi* contemporaries and probable friends of Sai Baba, Shamsuddin and Bannemiya, were still living in Aurangabad at the time of Sai Baba's death. While local memory of this *Sufi* community has almost died out, the evidence for its existence remains in the numerous *dargahs* in that city, including the large impressive *dargahs* of these two *Sufi pirs*, which are venerated there to this day. There are many *dargahs* in Aurangabad and Khuldabad, still cared for by *pirzadas* or descendants of the pirs. Carl Ernst in his recent book, *The Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Centre*, examines the nearby village of Khuldabad, and identifies it as an important *Sufi* centre in the past.[51]

Sharan Anand reported that Sai Baba told him that his *guru* was called Roshan Shah Mian. He comments that Roshan literally means light, used by Sai Baba in the sense of the light of understanding or wisdom. He adds:

> One should not be astonished if we say that Roshan Shah, spoken of by Baba, did exist in flesh and blood and Baba strenuously served him for over twelve years. It seems that Roshan Shah thereafter cast off his mortal coil and Baba buried him under or near the neem tree at present found near the Navalkarwada ....[52]

The burying of an older companion by a young unknown itinerant *faqir* may well go unrecorded and pass in time from local memory. If they wandered along the Godavari river from Pathri and Selu to Paithan, Dhoopkeda and Aurangabad and thence to Shirdi, these are all within a hundred miles or so, viable distances to wandering *faqirs* at that time. After arriving in Shirdi his *guru* may well have passed away after some time and been buried by Sai Baba under the *neem* tree. Currently it is accepted by Sai Baba devotees, that the reference to Sai Baba's *guru's* tomb under the *neem* tree must refer to a *guru* in a past life, and a story hagiographically linking him with Kabir, the sixteenth-century *sant*, is repeatedly introduced. However, if the story of Gopal Rao Desmukh of Selu is rejected in total, then the interpretation proposed by Sharan Anand becomes plausible, and we do not have to resort to past lives when referring to Sai Baba's *guru*'s burial place, known in Shirdi as the *Gurusthan*.

It is generally agreed that Sai Baba was about sixteen years old on his first visit to Shirdi, having the appearance of an itinerant *Sufi* with long hair under a cap, and after being seen there briefly, he disappeared for a period, which ranged from two months to seven years according to his various biographers. On his second visit, variously dated 1858 or 1872, he remained in Shirdi permanently, never venturing far from the environs of the village, and he resided there until his death 50 to 60 years later in 1918. An entire hagiography has developed around Sai Baba's second visit to Shirdi, when he first met Mhalsapati, the Hindu priest of the local Khandoba Temple. Arriving with the wedding party of Chand Patil in front of the Banyan tree near the Khandoba temple in Shirdi, Sai Baba must have had the general appearance of an itinerant *Sufi*, for Mhalsapati is reputed to have welcomed him with the Marathi words '*ya Sai*' (welcome Sai), thus incidentally bestowing upon him the name by which he was to become known for the rest of his life.[53] The temple dedicated to the local folk deity Khandoba, is still there in Shirdi with the legend of the naming of Sai Baba printed up for all to see (*see* Plate 7). *Sa'ih*, as stated earlier, is a Persian term used generically for all Muslim wandering mendicant *faqirs*, and in the absence of knowing his real name, he may well have hailed him thus. If the initial perception had been of a Hindu holy man or renunciate - known as a *sannyasin* or *sadhu*, Mhalsapati would undoubtedly have welcomed him differently. Some time previously Sai Baba had clairvoyantly located Chand Patil's lost mare; subsequently he was invited to stay with the Patil's Muslim family, and when his wife's brother's son was to be married to a bride in Shirdi, Chand Patil invited Sai Baba to join the party.[54] Chand Patil, who is described as a 'well-to-do Mahomedan gentleman', certainly perceived his new-found friend to be a *Sufi* for he enthusiastically proclaimed to everyone that he was an *awliya* - a *Sufi* saint and mystic, with great powers.

Mhalsapati is also responsible at this time, according to the folk legend, for turning the young Sai Baba away from resting in the Hindu Khandoba Temple, sending him rather to a dilapidated Muslim *masjid* on the outskirts of the village. This story is probably apocryphal as the young *faqir*, according to a number of sources, lived in the jungle for a few years, followed by a number of years spent living under the *neem* tree before moving to the old *masjid* permanently. However, even in the fact of its composition and inclusion in the biographies, the story informs us that Sai Baba must have had a distinctively Muslim *Sufi* appearance in order for Mhalsapati to refuse him residence in the temple of the folk-deity Khandoba (*see* Plate 8 of Mhalsapathi wearing 3 horizontal lines on his forehead indicating his allegiance to Lord Shiva with whom Khandoba is associated). Sontheimer has thrown some additional light on this incident, saying that Khandoba is a folk mountain deity, who is acknowledged to be an *avatar* of Shiva,[55] who is, significantly, also worshipped by the Muslims. Sontheimer comments:

> Khandoba's affiliation with the Muslims is visible in the style of his temples (as in Jejuri or in Andur, Osmanabad district). He [Khandoba] appears as a Pathan[56] on horseback, one of his wives is Muslim, and the keeper of the god's horses and his *kotval* (custodian) is a Muslim in Jejuri. In the *Martanda Vijaya* (24: 30-31) Muslims are expressly said to be his *bhaktas*.

Therefore, as a *Sufi*-Muslim Sai Baba may well have sought refuge in the Khandoba Temple by right. However, as Narasimhaswami informs us, at that time Muslims were known to be iconoclasts, and Mhalsapati may have refused him entry out of concern for the safety of the idol of Khandoba in the temple.[58]

When Sai Baba first came to Shirdi, he stayed with a Muslim man called Amanbhai who gave him food, according to a retired renenue officer named Raghuji Patel. The story was remembered and passed down through his family because, through Amanbhai, a young relative who was very sick at the time, was cured by a young Sai Baba, who came to the house and administered cobra poison to him as medicine.[59] This was in the early years before he relied on *udi* ash as a curative. It is unlikely that Amanbhai, a Muslim would invite a non-Muslim to his home and give him food. According to the biographers, when Sai Baba returned to Shirdi he lived for some four or five years under a *neem* (margosa) tree. For the first few years it is recorded that Sai Baba also wandered around and lived for long periods in the jungle in the environs of Shirdi. His demeanour at this time was said to be withdrawn, uncommunicative and taciturn and he would go to the jungle to meditate (*see* Plate 9). Sai Baba was eventually persuaded to take up residence in an old *masjid* which had an earth floor and had one wall missing, where he was to live for many decades (*see* Plate 10 of an early photograph of the *masjid* seen on the right). He began to minister to the villagers as a doctor and herbalist (*hakim*), and later resorted to curing illness and disease by simply applying some *udi* (ash) from his sacred fire which he kept burning continuously in the *masjid*. Yet he was observed to be constantly repeating '*Allah*', or phrases such as '*Allah Malik*' (God is the Master).

In 1886, when he was nearing the age of fifty, after having a number of mystical experiences, it appears that Sai Baba had a direct experience of union with God. After instructing Mhalsapati that he was 'going to *Allah*', and that he was to care for and protect his body for three days, Sai Baba appeared to die. Mhalsapathi looked after the 'corpse' as instructed, and after three days Sai

Baba regained consciousness. It was after this incident that his powers became evident, and he became a *pir* or guide for wandering *faqirs* who came to Shirdi. After his enlightenment experience, he demonstrated God-like powers such as clairvoyance known in Marathi as *antarjnana* (and called *firasa* by the *Sufis*), the ability to appear in devotees' dreams, or to appear in distant locations - all these powers being vouchsafed by devotees in records of their experiences. He had acquired the power to cure illnesses and protect individuals even in distant places. Speaking to Nana Chandorkar about this state in which God has revealed and unveiled himself, Sai Baba said:

> At that stage, God becomes the same as man; praise, the same as blame, etc. They have no desires. They [the Perfect ones called *siddhas*] are past the notion that the body is their home or their self. They feel their self to be identical with God. 'I am Brahman' is their feeling.[60]

As can be gathered from stray conversations with devotees, there were thus two distinct phases in Sai Baba's life. Up to age forty-eight or so, Sai Baba was a *faqir* practicing daily austerities to the extent that he was often categorized as a madman or *pagal* in the local language. After 1886, when he apparently 'died' and came back to life after having an experience of mystical union with God, he became one of the *awliya*. In the first period we can talk about his going through the steps and stages of the *Sufi tariqa* as an aspirant. In the latter period from 1886 to 1918 he was a Realized Master guiding and teaching *Sufi* precepts to those who became his disciples, and administering to those who came to him with their problems. His biographer writes:

> - He had no love for perishable things and was always engrossed in Self-realization which was his sole concern.... Though a *siddha* [Perfected one], He acted like a *sadhaka* [one who has not yet reached the goal].[61]

Furthermore, his Hindu devotees perceived him to be more than a *siddha* having attained the final stage of divine nature revealing itself, a stage termed *lahut* according to the *Sufis*, in which the saint is no different from God. One Hindu devotee said of Sai Baba, 'He fulfilled my idea of God on earth'[62], while C.K.Rajasaheb Bahadur encapsulated this conviction which he recorded for Narasimhaswami in 1936, when he said:

> To me he had no limitations. Of course, when he was with us, there was the fleshly tabernacle. That was prominently brought to our notice at times. But mostly the infinite aspect of His was what remained before me...[63]

Sai Baba left no direct discourses or writings, merely short lectures to small groups of devotees that had to be recollected later for his biographers. His method of conveying his message was through analogies, similes, and parables, or through the creation of didactic incidents which would enact and illustrate his message. Dabholkar writes, 'Baba's words were always short, pithy, deep, full of meaning, efficient and well-balanced'.[64] Lt. Col. Nimbalkar comments on his teaching thus:

> Sai Baba used to teach according to the disciples' state of mind, capacity and purity. His methods were remarkable, unforgettable and sometimes even humorous, unheard of and unorthodox.[65]

More memorable than mere spoken advice were his didactic scenes, the core ideas of which embodied universal truths, bringing them within the grasp of everyman. These scenes took the form of interactions, often humorous, between Sai Baba and a devotee, but the end result was to instill faith in Sai Baba, or to bring home a moral or a spiritual reminder to that individual. For example, to impart the message that spiritual progress has to be earned not merely given by a holy man, Sai Baba enacted a scene for one impatient devotee, when he laboriously sent to a moneylender for a loan, then upon refusal, to another etc.. Finally he asked Nana Chandorkar to write a chit requesting a loan, which was forthcoming immediately. Nana Chandorkar had the necessary credit-worthiness built up whereas Sai Baba was refused because everyone knew he was penniless with no collateral. Thus, the message delivered in such a graphic way, was that those who had earned spiritual credit could progress through the aid of a *guru*, whereas without such credit, further progress is impossible. Such incidents often included some miraculous occurrence which was recorded in later years, resulting in a body of written incidents from which his overall teaching can be deduced.

The question of whether Sai Baba was a Hindu or Muslim was an on-going puzzle to the streams of visitors who came to Shirdi in his later years and it was a question never fully resolved even at the end of his life. As the majority of devotees were Hindus in his latter years, he had allowed Hindu *puja* to be performed to him, yet he continued to dress in a poor *Sufi kafni*, and made constant reference to *Allah*. For 36 hours after his final breath on October 15, 1918, Hindu and Muslim devotees argued over his final resting place. The Hindus were more numerous, although Muslim theologians and ritualists known as *moulvis* and *maulanas* and *faqirs* were also present. The Muslims wanted the body buried in an open space in the manner of a typical *Sufi tomb* with an elaborate domed *dargah* built over the top similar to the tomb of Nizamuddin Aurangabadi (*see* Plates 11 & 12). The Hindus wanted him interred in the central area of the recently constructed Buty *wada,* a mansion built by the Nagpur millionaire, Mr. Buty, where a statue of Krishna with the flute known as the *muralidhar* was to have been installed. In the end, the Hindu majority view prevailed and he was buried with due procession and formality in the Buty *wada* (mansion), where his tomb soon developed into a shrine. This place also accorded with Sai Baba's own wishes when he indicated where he was to be buried. The Muslim *dargah* tradition, so strong in Maharashtra, is reflected in the appearance of the original shrine in the Buty *wada*, as illustrated in the early photographs (*see* Plates 13 & 14. Note the windows visible at this time, the simple picture and the railings so typical of a *dargah*). Three-quarters of a century later, it has become the Hindu-dominated *Samadhi Mandir*. Anne Hardgrove, in her review of *The Life and Times of Sai Baba of Shirdi* by Antonio Rigopoulos, suggests that the outcome of this struggle between Hindus and

Muslims to claim the rights over the burial and tomb of Sai Baba, 'marked the end of any *Sufi* claim, and was the beginning of the Hinduization of Sai Baba'.[66]

NOTES

1. Gustasp Irani, "Shirdi: Caught in a Time Warp," *Signature* (Bombay) (February 1990), p. 40.
2. Irani, "Shirdi: Caught in a Time Warp", p. 37.
3. DE, p. 279.
4. CS, No. 56.
5. DE, p. 157.
6. In the name of God, the Mercy-giving (Compassionate), the Merciful!
   Praise be to God, Lord of the Universe, the compassionate, the merciful!
   Ruler on the day for Repayment!
   You, do we worship and You, do we call on for help.
   Guide us along the straight road,
   The road of those whom you have favoured,
   With whom You are not angry, nor who are lost.
7. DE, p. 279.
8. DE, p. 77.
9. DE, p. 279.
10. *Saibaba MS*, 110 [K28].
11. SSG, pp. 40-41.
12. DE, p. 115.
13. SS, 7:4.
14. *Census of India*, 1961, Vol X: Maharashtra. Part VII-B: "Fairs and Festivals of Maharashtra." (Bombay: The Maharashtra Census Office, 1969), p. 116.
15. Charles Pain with Eleanor Zelliot, "The God Dattatreya and the Datta Temples of Pune", *The Experience of Hinduism: Essays on Religion in Maharashtra*, eds. Eleanor Zelliot and Maxine Bertsen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 98-9.
16. Rigopoulos, *The Life and Teachings of Sai Baba of Shirdi*, Prologue p. xxiii.
17. "*The Hindu*", issue dated 18-11-95 carries a report of the Supreme Court Judgement - New Delhi dated 17-11-95. This was also reported in *Sai Sudha*, All India Sai Samaj, Madras, December 1995.
18. *Konas na samga asana pranayama va idryadamana mantra tantra va yantra bhajana phumkana nan temhi na*. SS, 10: 113-14.
19. *mi kanavala tatsang nara guru navhe amaca dharma nirala ahe*. CS, No. 623.
20. DE, p. 280.
21. Sai Sharan Anand, *Shri Sai the Superman*, p. 4.

22. P.M. Currie, *The Shrine Cult of Mu'in al-din Chisthti of Ajmer* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 11.
23. Cyril Classe, *The Concise Encylopedia of Islam,* (London: Stacey International, 1989).
24. Another Persian term applied to a wandering *Sufi* was 'darvish' which was anglicized to 'dervish'.
25. Bharadwaja, *Sai Baba the Master*, p. 371.
26. CS, No. 472A.
27. SSG, p. 39.
28. C&S, No. 472A, p. 201.
29. "The Shirdi Sai Saga: Mystery and Message", *Sanathana Sarathi*, November 1992, p. 255
30. Rigopoulos gives the birthdate as 1835, following a discourse of Sri Sathya Sai Baba. This was subsequently changed to 1838 in a correction published in *Sanathana Sarathi*.
31. All the sources are in agreement that he was brought up by a *Sufi faqir*, including Bharadwaja, Kamath & Kher, and Rigopoulos.
32. Certain places names were altered after Independence in 1947, and in Maharashtra Poona became Pune, Kirkee became Khadki and Sailu became Selu.
33. Bharadwaja, *Sai Baba the Master*; Kamath and Kher, *Sai Baba of Shirdi*; and Rigopoulos, *The Life and Teachings of Sai Baba of Shirdi.*
34. Osborne, *The Incredible Sai Baba*, p. 17.
35. Sathya Sai Baba, "Discourse, 27 September 1992", *Sanathana Sarathi* (November 1992).
36. CS, No. 178. In another place it was reported that Sai Baba told a magistrate who questioned him that his guru's name was Venkusa. Osborne, *The Incredible Sai Baba*, p. 33.
37. Kamath and Kher, *A Unique Saint*, pp. 28-9.
38. DE, p. 107.
39. Kamath and Kher, *A Unique Saint*, p. 29.
40. Rigopoulos, *The Life and Teachings of Sai Baba of Shirdi*, p. 9.
41. LSB, III:155.
42. Rigopoulos, *The Life and Teachings of Sai Baba of Shirdi*, p. 8.
43. A.R. Kulkarni, *Social Relations in Maratha Country (Medieval Period)*, Poona: Deccan College, 1970, p. 13.
44. 'Venku Shah' could be a Dravidian pronunciation of 'Bengal Shah'. In Tamil the 'v' and 'b' are often interchangeable. An example is the popular song *Vande Mataram* (Hail Mother India) which can also be written *Bande Mataram*. Likewise 'nk' is pronounced 'ng', for example 'vanga' (Come!) is the oral pronounciation of 'vankal' where the 'k' is pronounced 'g' and the final 'l' is dropped.
45. DE, p. 106.
46. B.K. Narayan, *Saint Shah Waris Ali and Sai Baba*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House PVT Ltd., 1995, p. 15.

47. Rajarshi Bala Sanyasi, *Life and Teachings of Sai Baba*, Bangalore, Sri Parasaki Ashram, 1949, pp. 8-13.
48. *Shri Sai Baba*, Sai Sharan Anand, trans. V.B. Kher. (Sterling Publishers: New Delhi, 1997).
49. Kamath and Kher, *Sai Baba of Shirdi*, p. 6.
50. V.B.Kher. "A Search for the Birthplace of Shri Sai Baba", *Shri Sai Leela*, January 1976, reprinted October 1989, p. 34.
51. Carl W. Ernst, *The Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Centre*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.
52. Sai Sharan Anand, *Shri Sai the Superman*, pp. 20-21.
53. SSG, p. 23.
54. A *'patil'* is usually the largest land-owner of a village and therefore an influential man. This title is retained in many names in Maharashtra today.
55. For further discussion on the origins & folk aspects of Khandoba see "Rudra and Khandoba: Continuity in Folk Religion", by Gunther D. Sontheimer, in *Religion and Society in Maharashtra*. Eds., Milton Israel & N.K. Wagle, Toronto: Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Toronto, 1987, pp. 1-31.
56. A Pathan is a Muslim from the North-Western frontier of India.
57. Gunther D. Sontheimer, "Between Ghost and God: A Folk Deity of the Deccan". In *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees: Essays on the Guardians of Popular Hinduism*, ed. Alf Hiltebeitel, Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1989, pp. 299-337.
58. LSB, II:5.
59. DE, p. 257.
60. CS, No. 122.
61. SSG, p. 16.
62. G.S. Khaparde, Introduction to the First Edition, *Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi: A Glimpse of Indian Spirituality*, by Rao Bahadur M.W. Pradhan (Shirdi: Shri Sai Baba Sansthan, 1st ed. 1933, Rep. 1988), p. 8.
63. SSG, p. 24.
64. SSG, p. 72.
65. Lt. Col. Nimbalkar, "Sri Sai Baba's Philosophy", trans. A.B Kamble, *Shri Sai Leela*, n.d..
66. *Journal of Asian Studies* 53, No. 4, p. 1308.

CHAPTER TWO

Sufi Mysticism and Sai Baba

'The ideas which Baba was thoroughly soaked in, up to the last, were in no way distinguishable from Sufism', writes Narasimhaswami in his *Life of Sai Baba*.[1] So, it is necessary first to understand the precise nature of *Sufi* mysticism, its origin, nature, history, goals and philosophy, before we can elicit the *Sufi* connections of Sai Baba. In the next few chapters we will explore the origins of Sufism in Persia and Arabia, and, more importantly, Sufism within the Indian context, particularly in Maharashtra where it has a long and rich history. Then, we will examine the evidence for Sufism within the life and teachings of the mystic Sai Baba. Sufism is a fairly recent popular name for Islamic mysticism, which according to Nicholson is 'a subject so vast and many-sided that several large volumes would be required to do it anything like justice'[2]. The traditional Islamic term for the esoteric mysticism of Islam is *tasawwuf* in the languages of Persian, Arabic, Turkish and Urdu, which literally means 'the process of becoming a *Sufi*'. In the west t*asawwuf* is now more commonly known and referred to by its anglicized name of Sufism. But Sufism being the inner dimension of Islam, according to Lawrence, 'cannot be captured in even the most subtle verbal or literary exchange. It must be a felt experience, shared relationally and transmitted generation after generation from spiritual master to disciple.'[3] Today, there are many reference works available on the topic of Islamic Sufism[4], so that only a brief overview will be given here, in order to assist the reader to place our discussion of Sai Baba in a proper context.

Mysticism is said to be a universal phenomenon which, according to one of the oldest extant definitions, denotes an 'apprehension of divine realities'. According to Ranade, it is an attitude of mind which involves a direct, immediate, intuitive first-hand experience of God, which effects a total transformation of the individual.[5] It is an occurance which is to be found in all religious traditions and cultures, couched in a variety of divergent languages and symbols, but often kept secret. While mystical experience imparts a universal awareness, its outward expression is invariably coloured by the particular sectarian belief and practice out of which the mystic-experiencer emerged. Islamic mysticism therefore, according to Nicholson, 'must be viewed in connection with the outward and inward development of Islam'.[6] Danner observes:

> A great *Sufi* like Ibn al-'Arabi, for instance was a Muslim mystic, not a Buddhist mystic or a Hindu, and not just simply a mystic in the abstract. There is, perhaps, a point in the life of such a sage when the Islamic forms are left behind, and this is no doubt when mystical union with the Absolute takes place. But that is a spiritual identity that does not abolish the Islamic affliation of Ibn al-'Arabi's human nature; and indeed, that union could not have come about without Islam as its starting point, to begin with.[7]

In a similar vein, this book will show that, although Sai Baba and his message can be viewed as ultimately universal, he nevertheless emerged out of the Islamic path of *Sufi* mysticism. By appreciating this fact, the whole thrust of his life of voluntary poverty becomes instantly more understandable. His seemingly mysterious and enigmatic statements and teachings acquire force and relevance, when seen in a *Sufi* context.

The fifteenth-century Muslim historian, Ibn Khaldun, affirms that 'Sufism belongs to the sciences of the religious law that originated in Islam'.[8] Thus, the term Sufism denotes that dimension of mysticism which evolved out of Islam a century or two after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh and eighth centuries AD. The record of the Prophet's existential experiences during his mission to the Arabs is called the *Qur'an*.

It is the repository of the words of God delivered directly to Mohammad - who is known as *rasul Allah (*the messenger of God). Sufism has always maintained that its origin and foundation lay firmly in the inspired words of the *Qur'an* and the mystical statements of the Prophet. The thirteenth-century *Sufi* poet and mystic Jalalu'ddin Rumi emphatically affirms his allegiance to the *Qur'an*:

> I am the slave of the Koran [*sic*], while I still have life.
> I am the dust on the path of Muhammad, the Chosen One.
> If anyone interprets my words in any other way,
> I deplore that person, and I deplore his words.[9]

The Arabic word *islam* which means submission to God, has come to denote the Muslim religion itself - Islam. Ernst notes that this word is found relatively few times in the *Qur'an*. *A* more important key term is *iman* - faith, which is used hundreds of times in the sacred text and forms a major topic of the *Qur'an*.[10] It is noteworthy that faith (*nista)* is a key teaching of Sai Baba, and that his teaching to Abdul, his *faqiri* pupil, was based entirely upon the Qur'an as will be shown in the *Saibaba MS*. These issues are all expanded upon in later chapters.

Sufism has had a parallel development with orthodox Islam throughout their long histories, defining itself as the *batini* or hidden aspect of the Prophet's teaching not available to everyone. Such exclusivity has resulted in an uneasy relationship with the orthodox Muslim law known as the *shari'at*. To the orthodox Muslim, many aspects of Sufism appear non-conformist and even heterodox, which is perhaps the reason why *Sufis* have always remained on the fringe of Islam. However, most of the outstanding Islamic religious of the past millennium up to the beginning of the nineteenth century, were intimately engaged in what is termed today Sufism. It is only recently with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism that Sufism has been effectively excluded. Ernst attributes this to the West's conquering and colonizing of all the key Muslim areas from Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1793, to the breakup of the Ottoman Empire in 1920.[11] Today, many people mistakenly regard Sufism as totally separate from Islam. However, according to Ernst, premodern Muslim societies knew no such distinction. Due to the fundamentalist Islamic authoritarianism which is currently holding sway, an ambivalence has emerged which has spawned a critical attitude towards Sufism, especially in India where they perceive it to be a survival of medieval superstition, idolatry and corruption with 'such abominations as worship of tombs and pagan music borrowed from Hindus'.[12] But veneration of the *Sufi* saints and of their tombs is irrevocably intertwined with Islam.

Sufism divides the journey to God into three stages, using the traditional imagery of a tree. First is the root, the *shari'at* or Islamic code of religious law - the external orthodox conduct of everyday life. Second is the branch, the *tariqa*t or inward *Sufi* path comprised of mystical practices structured as a series of way-stations and states. Third the fruit, the *haqiqat*, where God is perceived to be the only Reality or Truth. *Sufis* are said to transcend the external rituals of Muslim religious life, in order to find an inner intuitive Reälity of God. Even then, there are varying degrees of ripeness of this final revelation, from a brief glimpse of the Truth to sustained gnosis or God-realization, called *ma'rifat*. At this stage a *Sufi* is seen to have transcended the world and gained possession of spiritual powers called *baraka,* bestowed upon him by the grace or *fadl* of God. The notion of gnosis also includes the final absorption into the essence of God or *al-Haqq,* as a result of which the *Sufi* is said to be no different from divinity itself, seen as the ultimate stage termed *lahut*. It is in the possibility of this final identity with God that Sufism differs radically from orthodox Islam.

Originally the Islamic ascetics and mystics termed themselves *ahl al-Haqq* or 'followers of God or the Truth'. How they later came to be known as *Sufis* is a question that has spawned a number of theories, the usually accepted one being that the early Muslim ascetics were identified by their coarse woollen cloaks known in Arabic as *jama-e-suf*, which they wore as a symbol of their renunciation of the world, penitence and devotion to God.[13] This was in stark contrast to the rich lavishness of the Court. The term

Sufi has come to denote a 'mystic' in both Persian and Arabic and specifically refers to a mystic of the Islamic faith. A *Sufi* was known for his esoteric qualities rather than externals: he is single in essence, nothing changes him nor does he change anything; he trusts his soul to God for whatever he wishes; and he seizes spiritual realities, giving up on what creatures possess.[14] According to Abdul Qadir al-Jilani, the celebrated medieval *Sufi* of Baghdad, the epithet *Sufi* was properly reserved for one who had reached 'the end of the path' or attained God-realization.[15] A true *Sufi* was one who had attained the status of *lahut*, and was known as *al-insanu al-kamil* or a 'Perfect Man' being united with God. The term 'Perfect' therefore has a very specific meaning and is not used loosely. Initially the term *Sufi* was never used for an aspiring disciple but in later centuries it came to include aspirants still treading the *Sufi* path and this has muddied the definition, rendering al-Jilani's finer distinction purely academic.

The whole thrust of *Sufi* mysticism is the conviction that, under certain conditions, following certain preparatory practices, it is possible to gain a direct experience of the invisible Godhead. Ranade describes it as 'a direct, immediate, first-hand, intuitional apprehension of God'.[16] For example, a matchstick, in order to burst into flame, has first to fulfil certain requirements: it must be dry; have the right chemical composition on its tip; be rubbed against a sufficiently rough surface; and be struck with a correct degree of force. Only then will the flame flare up. Similarly, God can be experienced directly only after certain basic requirements are fulfilled, and a *Sufi* is one who 'is prepared to go out of his way to put himself in a state whereby he may be enabled to do this'.[17] According to Ibn Khaldun, these basic requirements involve the aspirant 'to be assiduous in piety, to give up all else for *Allah*'s sake, to turn away from worldly gauds and vanities, to renounce pleasure, wealth and power, which are the general objects of human ambitions, to abandon society and to lead in seclusion a life devoted solely to the service of *Allah*.'[18] Thus a *Sufi* was one who was willing to sacrifice worldly goals and pleasures in order to gain a direct experience of God and ultimately become one with Divinity. Like the match, however, failure of any one component spells failure to reach the goal. Mu'inuddin Chishti sums it all up when in a letter to Shaykh Qutbuddin he writes, 'He who wants to know the essence of Sufism, should close the door of worldly pleasures for himself and follow the path of love. If he does it, he becomes a true *Sufi*.'[19]

The intervening thirteen hundred or so years, from the inception of the *Sufi* ideal until today, have seen many variations and innovations to this spiritual path, elaborating the basic steps towards God-realization. The golden era of Sufism in Persia appears to have been from the eighth to eleventh centuries, when stress was placed on practice and personal experience rather than on theory and rationality. The basic steps of the *Sufi tariqat* or path to guide seekers to experience the mystical union of the individual soul with the universal soul was carved out at this time. While the experience of individual Masters led to the formation of the various *Sufi* Orders over the centuries, they shared an underlying core of *Sufi* practice and precept. Sufism arrived in India in the eighth century but only gained popularity there during the tenth to thirteenth centuries with the arrival in Delhi and Lahore of some notable *Sufis* from Persia and Iraq. From there, they spread all over northern India including the Deccan, bringing their knowledge and texts with them. Later *Sufi* Orders became associated with great learning and tended to become overly preoccupied with the elucidation of texts and philosophical debate. Also, endless discourses and reams of poetry were written at this time. But original Sufism decries outward religious expression, especially the written word, prizing only the inward devotion of the heart. Al-Ghazzali insisted that '*Sufi* knowledge was to be acquired not by study but by practice.'[20] Abd al-Rahman Jami further summed up this *Sufi* credo saying, 'Strive to cast off the veil, not to augment book lore: no books will further thy intent. The germ of love to God grows not in books; shut up thy books, turn to God and repent.'[21]

The thrust of Sai Baba of Shirdi's whole life was one-pointed, focussed entirely upon God, giving up everything for the goal of God-realization, eschewing worldly comforts, wealth and fame, avoiding book-learning in favour of intense practice and devotional experience. He authored no books, letting his life and actions be his message. The only written record we have is the collection of accounts, recollected memories and sayings of Sai Baba authored by his devotees. According to Ernst, *the Qur'an* was frequently memorized by *Sufis* and recited in Arabic[22], and we know that Sai Baba used to recite in Arabic, although few Hindus could recognize what it was. Bapu Rao Chandorkar, reported that 'all *mantras* that Baba spoke or recited were Arabic or Persian etc. and not Sanskrit.'[23] Although the *Saibaba MS* reveals that Sai Baba was familiar with the great *Sufi* Masters and the genealogies of many of the Orders such as Chishtiyya, Suhrawadiyya and Qadiriyya, as well as smaller sects, there is no evidence that he formally belonged to any of them.

Richard Eaton's work illustrates that the term *Sufi* took on additional connotations at certain periods of Indian history. He shows that *Sufis* in seventeenth century Bijapur, for example, filled a variety of social roles such as missionaries, warriors, reformers, literati, and landed elites.[24] The early *Sufi* texts reveal however that such exoteric worldly activities and roles in society were totally outside the mandate of the early esoteric *Sufi* tradition of the eighth and ninth centuries. Sai Baba was a *faqir* all his life and neither took part in worldly affairs, nor did he take on any of the social roles that *Sufis* held in the past in such centres as Bijapur, described by Eaton. Similarly, in this century, Sufism has undergone yet another interpretation by the Iranian *Nimatullah Sufis*, now based in London, England. There are also 'performances' by Whirling Dervishes and 'popular' *qawwali* singers in the concert halls of the west. Such manifestations of modern Sufism lie outside of our definition.

The early concept of Sufism has undergone a resurgence in recent decades due in part to the English translations from the Persian and Arabic, by Reynold A. Nicholson and others, of the greatest of its early texts from the eighth to thirteenth centuries. The original ideal of Sufism has been clarified, and indeed the whole area of mysticism known as the *tasawwuf* is now more fully accessible to the west. Two classic texts expound the early *tasawwuf* including the *Sufi tariqat* . The first is *Kitab al-Luma 'fi't-tasawwuf* (The Flame of Sufism) by Abu Nasr al-Sarraj which is the oldest authority written in the tenth century.[25] The second is *The Kashf al-Mahjub the Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism* (The Unveiling of the Veiled), which was written in the eleventh century by 'Ali ibn 'Uthman al-Hujwiri.[26] Al-Sarraj from Tus in eastern Iran, wrote *The Flame of Sufism* in order to set forth 'the true principles of Sufism, which he distilled from the sayings of all the great *Sufi* Masters.' That al-Sarraj was not merely an author, but an adept putting into practice the *Sufi* precepts, is illustrated in a story told of him when he was in Baghdad one time during Ramadan, a period when an adept is required to fast from dawn to sunset. He recited the *Qur'an* five times every night, and each night a servant would bring a loaf of bread to his room. When al-Sarraj departed at the end of the month-long Ramadan festival, thirty loaves were found untouched.[27] A century later in India, al-Hujwiri, known by the epithet *Data Ganj Bakhsh* or 'Bestower of Treasure', wrote *Kashf al-Mahjub*, the oldest Persian treatise on Sufism, in order to lay down a complete system of Sufism which would elucidate the doctrines and goals of the *Sufis*. Al-Hujwiri came from Ghazna in Afghanistan, and died at Lahore in 1071 AD where the site of his *dargah* became a much venerated shrine and has been a revered place of pilgrimage right up to the present day. These works have again re-focused the original meaning of Sufism as the path to experiencing God directly to the exclusion of all else.

Both these early *Sufi* sources describe the *maqamat* and *ahwal* which are the structured way-stations and states on the Sufi mystical path, which were composed through trial and error from direct experiences of early ascetics experimenting with methods to attain the realization of God. Although various *Sufi* masters found diverse numbers of way-stations - ranging from four up to a thousand - traditionally seven have come down as authoritative; *tawbat* - repentance; *wara* - abstinence; *zuhd* - renunciation; *faqr* - poverty; *sabr* - patience; *tawakkul* - complete trust or faith in God; and *rida* - contentment or acceptance of all as God's Will.[28] A *Sufi* aspirant acquires different titles as he moves through the structured steps of the mystic *tariqa* or path. Initially as an aspirant or seeker after God, he is called a *talib*. Once he submits himself to the guidance of a *Sufi* master his journey goes through three distinct phases: first, as a *murid* or novice he is led through a program of disciplines and purifications, whereby the mirror of his heart is polished; second, as a more advanced wayfarer or seeker he is called a *salik;* and third, when he attains the status of a 'Perfected' man he is known as *al-insanu al-kamil*, having fully realized his identity with the essence of God. At this point he is what we in the west would call a saint. However defined, the *Sufi* adept is said to ascend the rungs of the interior spiritual ladder, guided by his preceptor, director or master, variously known in Persian as a *pir*, in Arabic as a *sheikh,* or in Urdu as a *murshid*. Extraordinary miraculous powers known in Islam as *karamat* can arise out of their intense spiritual practices, or from the Grace of God, and are an essential element of a saint's power, particularly at his tomb or *dargah*.

There is no way of knowing the extent of Sai Baba's familiarity with the early *Sufi* texts. It is most probable that the content of the *Sufi* lore, especially the stations of the *Sufi* path, would be general knowledge among the *pirs* of the Deccan - initally transmitted via the *Sufi* Masters from the eleventh century onwards,and passed on orally by *pirs* to their disciples. It is not being suggested here that Sai Baba studied these written texts or indeed any *Sufi* texts. - but rather that his *murshid* guide would have imparted this knowledge by word of mouth, and thus he would be very familiar with basic *Sufi* precepts, being circulated orally throughout Maharashtra. Memorization is very much a part of Islamic practice, especially for the *Qur'an*. This supposition is supported by evidence from the *Saibaba MS*, to be given later. The *Sufi* practices of Sai Baba can be shown to be much closer to the early mystical tradition of al-Sarraj and al-Hujwiri than those of the *Sufis* of Bijapur for example, and, according to his sayings, he was more interested in the experiential aspect of mystical communication with God, than textual scholarship or debate. In describing the various stations in relation to Sai Baba, there are two aspects to be considered, first his personal practices in order to reach God-realization, and second his status having reached it - as a *Sufi* master guiding others. The *Sufi* novice initially is concerned to purify his *nafs* or carnal self, in order to start on the path, and in order to develop his intuitive faculties to attain divine realization. According to Sufism, this ultimate experience can stem either from the grace of God (*fadl*) alone or from a structured program of ascetic practices, contemplation, intense devotion and sole reliance on God. Sai Baba's life, teachings and sayings will be further examined in the light of the *Sufi* way-stations and states in Part II.

The *Saibaba MS* shows that Sai Baba explained to Abdul the four aspects of Islam: *shari'at*, *tariqat*, *haqiqat*, and *ma'rifat*, and gives the names of historical individuals who promoted each of these aspects. The *shari'at* is the foundation for Muslim orthodoxy, and is followed by the masses as Islam. The *tariqat* is the province of *Sufi* Masters and as such Sai Baba dealt mostly with guiding the many itinerant *faqirs* who visited Shirdi over many decades. While he adhered to the spirit of the Muslim law and could recite the *Qur'an* as evidenced by Abdul, he did not rigidly perform the five pillars of Islam with its meticulous schedule of *namaz* or ritual prayer.[29] His method was different from orthodox Muslim ritual, being the ascetic, renunciate mystic path with emphasis on *dhikr* - the unbroken recollection of the Name of *Allah*. The *Qur'an* declares that *Sufis* are men 'whom neither trading nor selling diverts from the remembrance of God'. Sai Baba constantly repeated the name of *Allah* and intoned similar statements like *Allah Malik Hai*. He is an example of one who had achieved the third and fourth stages of *Sufi* attainment, namely *haqiqat*, the Truth and *ma'rifat* , permanent gnosis as evidenced by his miracles (*karamat*). At this stage, annihilation of the separate ego self and of false identification with the body has taken place. This annihilation, termed *fana* by the *Sufis*, is what Sai Baba was referring to when he said: "This body is just my house. My guru Mourshad [*murshid*] has long ago taken me away from this."[30] He also exemplifies the final *lahut* stage of identification with the divine, declaring "Ana'l Haqq - I am God".

In his Persian Treatise on Sufism, Hujwiri declares that 'You must know that the principle and foundation of Sufism and knowledge of God rests on saintship'.[31] Saints or sainthood is the English translation of *wilayat* - from *wali,* meaning friend, protege or devotee.[32] In Sufism however, the word saint implies no accompanying canonization process as it does in the Christian Roman Catholic church. A *Sufi* saint is one who is observed to have realized God, and who can perform miracles. In *Qur'anic* usage, the term *wali* and its plural *awliya*, denote 'a friend of God' as understood from the verse in the *Qur'an*: "Hearken, the friends of *Allah*, that is those who believe and are ever mindful of their duty to *Allah*, shall certainly have no fear nor shall they grieve..."[33] From this verse arose the expression *Awliya Allah* or friends of God, which has come to refer to Muslim or *Sufi* saints. Al-Tirmidhi was the first to expound on the doctrine of *wilayat* averring that 'God has saints *(awliya)* whom He has specially distinguished by His friendship and whom He has chosen to be the governors of His kingdom and has marked out to manifest His actions and has peculiarly favoured with diverse kinds of miracles (*karamat*)...'[34] In the Deccan, however, the plural term *awliya* was often employed in a singular sense, and thus Sai Baba was often referred to as an *awliya*. When the *faqir* Sai Baba directed Chand Patil to miraculously find his lost mare which had been lost for months, this 'Mahomedan gentleman' declared to everyone that he must be an *awliya*.[35] In the following decades, Sai Baba gained the reputation throughout the Bombay Presidency of being a saint and miracle-worker who would grant people's earnest desires. He said that he gave material help to people in order that they may then come to want the spiritual wealth which he had really come to give.

According to the *Sufis* there must always exist upon the earth a man who is a perfect channel of Grace from God to man and is given the title *qutb* which means literally 'pole' or 'axis of the Universe'. A *qutb* is invariably a realized or 'Perfect' Master. He may sometimes be known also as the *ghaus* or 'help', which further indicates a being of high spiritual rank. According to some *Sufi* authorities, there can only be one *qutb* on the earth at any one time. The underlying idea is that as the physical world revolves on its axis so too the spiritual world centres around the spiritual energy of a perfected *qutb*, and he becomes the centre of the universe. According to the Persian poet, Rumi, 'The *qutb* is he who turns about himself - the celestial spheres rotate round about him'.[36] Rumi also stressed the importance of a *Sufi* aspirant knowing the identity of the current *qutb* in the world saying in his *Mathnawi*, 'He who does not know the true *Sheikh,* i.e. the Perfect man and *qutb* of his time - is a *kafir*, an infidel'.[37] This notion of a 'Perfect Man' or *al-insanu al-kamil* is integral to Sufism and is used to refer to one who has realized God in his heart. This phrase *al-insanu al-kamil* was first articulated by Ibn Arabi and refers to one who has fully realised his essential oneness with the Divine Being, when the veil of sense is suddenly lifted and the conscious self passes away in the overwhelming glory of 'the One true Light'.[38] It is the culmination of the states or *maqamat* and stages or *ahwal* of the *Sufi* path. Abdul Qadir al-Jilani who lived from 1088-1166 CE was regarded as the *qutb* of his age, and was also known by the name *Ghaus Bakhsh* which means 'gift of help' in Sind. Ibn Arabi tells the story about Abdul Qadir al-Jilani who, on his deathbed in Baghdad, predicted that a man called Muhyiuddin would come in fifty years for his *khirqa* or cloak, symbolizing the transfer of *baraka* or spiritual power. He said that this man would be the *ghaus* or *qutb* of his age. Muhyiuddin Ibn Arabi went to Baghdad and on being shown the house where Qadir al-Jilani died fifty years before, was presented with his cloak.[39] The prediction was thereby fulfilled.

Sai Baba was obviously aware of his own spiritual and cosmic role, at least after 1886, although he never actually referred to it directly. Through his paradoxical statements such as "I am the Attributeless Absolute, *Nirguna*", and "I am Parvardigar (God), I live at Shirdi and everywhere", he hints at his divine role. Narke offers the following perceptive comment on the nature of Sai Baba:

'To one deeply observing him; the startling fact came out into greater and greater prominence that Baba was living and operating in other worlds also, besides this world and in an invisible body.'[40] Sai Baba's two major biographers, Dabholkar and Narasimhaswami, were intelligent men but not spiritually qualified to interpret his cosmic significance in the spiritual hierarchy. This was left to Meher Baba who spoke a great deal about the cosmic aspect of sainthood.

Merwan Sheriar Irani, later known as Meher Baba, was a Parsi by birth who was initiated by a *Sufi* saint called Hazrat Babajan in Poona. Babajan was a female *faqir* who was reputed to be around a hundred years old and who made her home under a *neem* tree in Poona. As a *Sufi* contemporary of Sai Baba, more of her biography is given later in Part I. Merwan often visited her, and one day in 1913 received a kiss from her on the forehead, which tore away the veil which obscured his divinity from himself. He says: 'At the time Babajan gave me *nirvikalp* (inconceptual) experience of my own reality, the illusory, subtle and mental bodies - mind, worlds, and one and all created things - ceased to exist for me even as illusion.'[41] This put Meher Baba into a superconscious state which lasted nine months, after which he visited many saints and felt impelled to visit Sai Baba of Shirdi. In his now famous meeting with Sai Baba, Merwan fell down in prostration and Sai Baba looking him in the eye exclaimed, '*Parvardigar*' meaning God-Almighty Sustainer.[42] This incident is reported in Meher Baba's own words in his *Reminiscences*[43], although his biographer C.B. Purdom fails to mention this fact in his biography of Meher Baba.[44] Sai Baba further indicated that he should go to see Upasani Maharaj in the Khandoba temple. This close devotee of Sai Baba greeted Merwan by throwing a stone at him which struck him between the eyes - the very spot of Babajan's kiss. Immediately he began to return to normal consciousness. Thereafter Meher Baba's life was devoted to exploring states of cosmic consciousness and the levels of spiritual hierarchy.

The traditional *hadith* speaks of the functioning of an invisible spiritual hierarchy of saints in the world, and upon whom the mainteneance of the world rests, but who remain largely unknown. Meher Baba, further elaborates in his book *God Speaks*, that in each age there is a governing body of five *qutbs* or Perfected Masters, plus numerous *walis* or saints. Each has a particular sphere of duty. The head of the hierarchy is called *qutb-e-irshad*. The five Perfect Masters guide the destinies and affairs of all men and creatures of this world and worlds invisible to outer eyes. He identified Sai Baba of Shirdi as the Perfect Master among Masters. He describes the five Perfect Masters as the five persons of their age...

> ...who not only become God but, after achieving God-realization, also come down to the ordinary consciousness of man. Thus they possess simultaneously God-consciousness, plus mental, subtle, and gross consciousness. The world is never without the five men-God. In spite of appearing as five different men, they are and always remain one God, as each one has exactly the same supreme existence of God-consciousness. Nevertheless in external relations with the world, each shows different personality, with his own characteristic traits, tastes, nature, habits and ways of dealing with people.[45]

The five Perfect Masters of the early part of this century, according to Meher Baba, were the Maharashtrian saints Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi, Sri Upasani Maharaj of Sakori, Hazrat Babajan of Poona, Tajuddin Baba of Nagpur and Narayan Maharaj of Kedgaon. A Perfect Master may come from any background for he has transcended all sectarian labels. Babajan, Tajuddin Baba and Sai Baba were all *Sufis* who enjoyed listening to *qawwalis* or *Sufi* devotional songs, while the other two were Hindu, of whom Upasani Baba never enjoyed these songs. Meher Baba said of Sai Baba:

> You will never be able to understand thoroughly how great Sai Baba was. He was the very personification of perfection. If you knew him as I know him you would call him the master of creation.[46]

While in later life he was known as *Avatar* Meher Baba, his definition of an *avatar* is one who reincarnates again and again out of compassion for humanity.[47] This is a similar idea to that of the *Bodhisattva* in Buddhism.

All the other saints are ranked in a hierarchy beneath the *qutb*, and derive their authority through him. The rank of saints was judged according to their degree of illumination and *ma'rifat* or gnosis, and the terminology of sainthood was laid down by the tenth century *Sufi* saint Al-Tirmidhi. Saints in groups of 3, 4, 7, 40 or 300 were given the duties associated with the harmonious maintenance of the universe. Under the *qutb* are three *nuqaba* or saints who act as substitutes; then under them are four *awtad* or 'pillars'; under them are seven *abrar* or 'pious'; under them are forty *abdal* or 'substitutes'. Supporting these top 'saints of heaven' as they are called, are three hundred *akhyar* or 'good men', and four thousand hidden saints.[48] Hujwiri decribing the duties of the *awtad* titles them 'Governors of the universe':

> Every night the *awtad* must go round the whole universe, and if there should be any place on which their eyes have not fallen, next day some imperfection will appear in that place, and they must then inform the *qutb*, in order that he may fix his attention on the weak spot and that by his blessing the imperfection may be removed.[49]

The seven *abrar* are similarly mentioned as spiritual guardians, but in their case, as protectors of sacred places. The *abdal*, or the group of forty saints in the hierarchy, have gained a prominent position in the folk history of Sufism, and are associated with the ascetic tradition. According to Ibn Arabi there are seven *abdal* each associated with different climates. In the *Saibaba MS* there are at least six pages of notes on the topic of the hierarchy of saints and this is further discussed in chapter twelve in Part II.

For the mass of people in the past, the mark of a great *Sufi* saint was his ability to perform miracles. Miracles performed by saints were known in Islam as *karamat*, and were indications of their closeness to God. While a lack of miracles did not preclude saintly status, it was generally understood that God bestows his Grace in the form of power or *baraka*, and from this power came the ability to perform miracles. While miracles are generally disdained in modern academic religious studies, Annemarie Schimmel, a noted contemporary Islamicist, concludes that 'there is no doubt that many *Sufis* indeed had extraordinary powers to perform acts that seem to supersede natural laws'.[50] Hujwiri also affirms that 'both the *Qur'an* and the Tradition proclaim the reality of miracles and extraordinary acts wrought by saints', and a miracle serves as 'a token of a saint's veracity'. He goes on to say that 'in fact, miracles or *karamat* and saintship are Divine gifts, not things acquired by man'.[51] Islamic hagiographical literature, which has accrued down the centuries, is filled with anecdotal material pertaining to such miracles as healing the sick, clairvoyant knowing, thought-reading, materialization, reviving the dead, controlling the elements, walking on water and bilocation. So common was this phenomenon that twenty-five categories of *karamat* were able to be identified by the theologians. Sufism is careful to distinguish the miracles of the Prophet from those of saints. The former are termed *mu'jizat* and are unique to the Prophet himself, and are unable to be reproduced, as opposed to the *karamat* of the saints. There is an amazing similarity among reports of miracles performed by *Sufi* Masters from widely differing localities. Sai Baba of Shirdi was famous in the Deccan as a miracle-working saint, and in reviewing the miracles attributed to him by devotees, it is remarkable how they dovetail with the reported categories of *Sufi* miracles.

An important *karamat* associated with *Sufi* adepts is clairvoyance or soul-reading, known as *firasa*. The Master is said to be able to discern a disciple's secret wishes, hopes and dislikes, and have an insight into the level of his spiritual development. Hujwiri tells the story of 'Abu'l Hasan Nuri who was called Nuri 'because when he spoke in a dark room the whole room was illuminated by the light (*nur*) of his spirituality'. Sai Baba evidenced on many occasions that he knew precisely the level of spiritual awareness that a particular visitor to Shirdi had, and would treat him accordingly. The more one studies Sai Baba, the more apparent it becomes that each devotee or visitor was treated on an individual basis, with the sole aim being to advance that person towards God-realization. To some who yearned for instant realization, he demonstrated that they first had to earn spiritual credit. Others were kept strictly on the spiritual path of renunciation, while for more worldly followers he healed their physical ills or made sure they were provided for financially. Gunaji reports that 'Sai Baba loved his devotees and anticipated their wishes and movements'. There are innumerable instances where Sai Baba clairvoyantly knew ahead of time when something would occur. Once, Nanasaheb Chandorkar, a Mamlatdar of Nanded received notice of a job transfer to Pandharpur, the centre for worship of Lord Vitthala, and he was to leave immediately without time to inform anyone. On the way he suddenly decided to stop off at Shirdi to tell his guru Sai Baba. When he was nearing Shirdi, Sai Baba in the *mosque* with three devotees, suddenly declared, 'Let us all four do some *bhajan*, the doors of Pandhari are open, let us merrily sing'. As Chandorkar approached he was amazed to hear them singing 'I have to go to Pandharpur, and I have to stay on there, for it is the house of my Lord.'[52] Another remarkable instance of Sai Baba's clairvoyance was related by Professor Narke in *Devotees' Experiences* regarding his career. As a young mining engineer around 1913, Narke went to Shirdi to take *darshan* of Sai Baba. The saint would often bless his geological assignments in distant places, but never fail to add Poona - saying, for example, that he should go to 'Burma and Poona'. Narke would laugh to himself as there was no possibility of jobs for mining engineers in Poona. However, in 1918 a post became available at the University of Poona for a Professor of Geology and Chemistry, and Narke was offered it. True enough he was to spend most of his working life in Poona, but as Narke remarked about Sai Baba's early prediction, 'The entire future of my career was but present to him [Sai Baba].'[53]

Some of the most phenomenal miracles attributed to *Sufi* saints are the vicarious taking on of the suffering of a disciple or a devotee, or the prevention of danger to someone by attracting the imminent hurt to his own body. They were also noted for their intervention causing miraculous escapes from danger and death. Schimmel quotes the story of the Sindhi saint who fell in love with a beautiful boy, but as a result of the wrath of the boy's father was thrown in the Indus with a mill-stone tied around his neck. The saint was later seen sitting on the mill-stone which was floating in the water.[54] The *Sufi* hagiographies contain the story of Bayazid Bistami who invited his disciples to kill him if, in a state of ecstasy, he made any heretical statements. When this did occur again, the disciples tried to stab him with knives, but found that what they thought to be the body of Bayazid was just thin air. Disciples saw hundreds of Bayazids, but later it was found that the 'real' Bayazid was unharmed. Many illustrations of vicarious suffering can be taken from the hagiography of Sai Baba, but two instances will suffice. In 1911, there was an epidemic of plague raging in the Shirdi region when Mrs. Khaparde and her young son came to visit Sai Baba. It was soon apparent that her son had developed a high fever and big buboes symptoms of the plague began to appear on his body. The frightened mother sought out Sai Baba to ask permission to return home with her sick child. Baba spoke kindly and assuringly to her, and then 'he lifted up his *kafni* up to the waist and showed to all present, four fully developed buboes, as big as eggs, and added "See, how I have to suffer for my devotees; their difficulties are mine."'[55] All evidence of bubonic plague immediately disappeared from the boy, and the life of young Balwant Khaparde was saved. The second instance is dated as having occurred during the Divali festival of 1910, when Sai Baba, sitting beside his *dhuni* feeding the fire with logs, suddenly thrust his arm and hand into the fire and was very badly burnt. The devotees who were close dragged him away, scolding him for doing such a strange thing. Sai Baba, 'coming to his senses', or returning to normal consciousness, recounted what had happened:

> The wife of a blacksmith at some distant place, was working the bellows of a furnace; her husband called her. Forgetting that her child was borne on her waist, she ran hastily and the child slipped into the furnace. I immediately thrust my hand into the furnace and saved the child. I do not mind my arm being burnt, but I am glad the life of the child was saved.[56]

This amazing event, occurring some miles away, was subsequently confirmed by the blacksmith.

Space and time have no meaning for an illumined saint, therefore travelling a distance is no problem for he is there as fast as thought.[57] Hujwiri once visited a great Shaykh who asked why he had come. Hujwiri replied that he wanted to meet him in person. The saint assured him that he had always been with him and gave a date. Amazed, Hujwiri realised that this was the date of his conversion. The Shaykh then told him, 'To traverse distance is child's play; henceforth pay visits by means of thought; it is not worthwhile to visit any person, and there is no virtue in bodily presence.'[58] A saint could also practice *buruz* which is that he could be seen in two different places at the same time. According to his hagiography, Rumi was famous for going to the aid of disciples, when for instance they were in danger from robbers, or for assuming a form in order to protect dsiciples when they called for help. Narasimhaswami relates a similar incident where Sai Baba came to the rescue of his devotee Nana Chandorkar, appearing as a local hill tribesman. About forty miles from Shirdi there is a beauty spot called Harischandra Hill on the top of which is a Devi temple that Chandorkar wished to visit. The day he chose was hot and the countryside was treeless and the party had difficulty climbing the barren rock of the hill. Chandorkar, who was rather corpulent, soon became tired and thirsty. On asking his friend for water, he was informed that there was none at all. Nana immediately thought 'If Sai Baba were here, he would surely give me water to slake my thirst.' The friend was very sceptical but the prayer for help had gone out to Sai Baba. Back in Shirdi, Sai Baba suddenly exclaimed, "Hallo, Nana is very thirsty. Should we not give him a handful of water?" This statement was totally incomprehensible to those around Baba. Back on the hill, however, a Bhil, a hill tribesman came towards them and Chandorkar asked him for water. The Bhil replied that under the very slab of rock upon which he was sitting was water. They set about moving the slab and underneath, as predicted, there was a quantity of cool refreshing water. On entering the masjid a few days later, Chandorkar was greeted by Sai Baba who before he could be told said, "Nana you were thirsty; I gave you water; did you drink?"[59] This incident strengthened Nana's faith that God was 'merciful and compassionate', omnipresent and omnipotent!

Fertility miracles were the most often requested of a *Sufi* saint - to bless a barren woman with children. Much of the saint worship at *dargahs* involves this request, and small bundles or cradles were tied to trees in its vicinity, since infertility was a great source of sorrow, and beyond the scope of doctors of the day to remedy. Many people came to Sai Baba for his blessings to obtain children. He would show a gesture of blessing and give *udi*, a coconut, mango or tamarind fruit as a symbol of fertility. The son of Shyama Deshpande, Uddhao Madhavrao, when interviewed in 1985 recalled that a family came from Hyderabad to see Baba. They could not have children and asked for his blessings. Baba refused at first saying "It depends on your faith. I can't give you grace." They begged Shyama to intercede for them. After two days Baba gave them a coconut to eat and twelve months later they returned with a child to be blessed by Baba. Many similar stories of Sai Baba's miracles are told throughout this book.

A cardinal tenet of the *Sufis* is that a spiritual Guide is essential to help a *salik* on his spiritual journey, as the way is beset with many pitfalls. One who attempts to traverse the path without a guide is said to have Satan for his guide.[60] Rumi claimed that, 'whoever travels without a guide needs two hundred years for a two days journey.'[61] Sai Baba, like Rumi, also stressed the importance of a Guru to guide one through the jungle of spiritual life. Kakasaheb Dixit understood that Sai Baba was speaking in the form of a parable about the importance of a Guru to guide one on the spiritual path towards the mystical goal, in this dialogue:

> *Baba*: There are many ways leading there; there is one way also from here (Shirdi). The way is difficult. There are tigers and wolves in the jungles on the way.
> *Kakasaheb*: But Baba what if we take a guide with us?
> *Baba*: Then there is no difficulty. The guide will take you straight to your destination, avoiding wolves, tigers and ditches etc. on the way. If there be no guide, there is the danger of your being lost in the jungles or falling into ditches.[62]

In the line, 'there is one way also from here (Shirdi)', Sai Baba is informing the novice that he himself will be the guide for those who accept him. In his absolute mode Sai Baba identified himself as the Guru-guide, saying: "Look to me; and I will look to you. Trust in the Guru fully. That is the only *sadhana*."[63] Sai Baba on one rare occasion described the intensity of his own faith and trust in his *Pir*, even when he was a young boy, a mere *murid*:

> For 12 years I waited on my Guru who is peerless and loving. How can I describe his love to Me? When he was in *Dyanastha* [meditation of the love of God] I sat and gazed at him. We were both filled with bliss...The Guru's absence for a second made me restless...Unceasingly fixed upon him was my mind...By his grace, I attained to my present state. Making the *Guru* the sole object of one's thoughts and aims one attains Paramartha, the Supreme Goal. This is the only truth the *Guru* taught me. The four Sadhanas and six Sastras are not necessary. *Trusting in the Guru fully is enough* [sic].[64]

The parallel with *Sufi* practice is very close, as illustrated by Nicholson, who gives a summary of how a dervish or *faqir* attains to union with God:

> The disciple must, mystically, always bear his *Murshid* (spiritual director) in mind, and becomes mentally

> absorbed in him through a constant meditation and contemplation of him. The teacher must be his shield against all evil thoughts. The spirit of the teacher follows him in all his efforts, and accompanies him wherever he may be, quite as a guardian spirit.[65]

According to Subhan, 'A *pir* is to be followed blindly, and in actual practice, is obeyed as much as the Prophet Muhammad. The least word of the *pir* is absolute law to his disciple.'[66] Sai Baba's obedience and total reliance on his *pir* is an example of this *Sufi* stricture. There were a number of great *Sufi* centres in the Nizam's territories and Maharashtra, such as Hyderabad, Bidar, and Aurangabad, places reasonably close to Sai Baba's birthplace in Pathri. It is likely that there were a number of itinerant *pirs* in the Deccan of whom there is no surviving record, and one of these could well have been Sai Baba's *pir*. In Maharashtra the terms *pir* and *guru* are generally interchangeable, but Sai Baba referred to his *pir/guru* in the Persian terminology of *murshid*, giving his name as 'Venkusha'. There were many *faqirs* and *Sufi* divines who commonly had the term *Shah* suffixed to their name, a term which originally meant king, and was also used to indicate spiritual eminence. In Maharashtra there are a number of examples of this. As indicated earlier, in an oral tradition it is very likely that the name 'Venkusha', originally was Venku Shah.[67] Sai Sharan Anand distinctly recalls that Sai Baba once told him: "My *guru's* name is Roshan Shah Mian",[68] a distinctively *Sufi* name. However, no further clarification was given. Sai Baba knew some Persian and Arabic and it is known that he used to talk and sing in these languages in his early days in the *takya* at Shirdi.[69] It is highly probable therefore that Sai Baba had a *Sufi pir*.

During the nineteenth century in India there were many labels attached to those who adopted varying degrees and modes of renunciate life-style. A Hindu ascetic would variously be called a *yogi, sannyasi* or *vairagi*, while a Muslim renunciate would be a *Sufi, darwish* (a Persian word anglicized to dervish and is literally 'one who is at the sill of the door' to enlightenment), *qalandar*, or *faqir*. A *faqir* is one who embraced poverty, a term derived from the Arabic root *faqr* meaning poor, used in the sense of holy poverty. Although a *faqir* may be identified as a Muslim renunciate in the Indian milieu, it would be generally understood that he would be a *Sufi* following the stations known as *maqamat* of the *Sufi* path. Some of the early sources equate the true *faqir* with the genuine *Sufi*, but later subtle distinctions crept in between a *Sufi* and a *faqir*, as this saying by Ibn Khalif reveals: 'The *Sufi* is he whom God has chosen (*istafa*) for Himself, out of love, and the *faqir* is he who purifies himself in his poverty in the hope of drawing near [to God].'[70] However, by the nineteenth century such subtle distinctions had disappeared and the two titles were synonymous. Over time, the meaning of words can change and can include associations that are far from their original meaning. For example, originally a *faqir* was one who embraced poverty for a higher holy purpose, but in modern usage the term *faqir* [which is often anglicized to fakir] has popularly come to refer to a public performer of stunts and magic, such as lying on a bed of nails; it has associations with fake, or fraud, or may even be used in the West for an impostor masquerading as a holy man. In the 1930's and 40's during the period of the British Raj, M.K. (Mahatma) Gandhi was referred to as 'a half-naked *faqir*', an expression used in a derogatory sense adding to the misuse of the word. However, it is important to realize that the meaning of the term *faqir*, as it was understood in its Indian-Islamic milieu at the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century, was simply a *Sufi* aspirant who has neither wealth nor desire for worldly wealth and whose overwhelming urge was to see God face to face. This was always the goal of Sai Baba, who throughout his lifetime was known as a Muslim *faqir*. The area of western India known as the Deccan, which is almost entirely in Maharashtra, was particularly favoured by the *Sufi faqirs*. In the next chapter we will examine the Sufi tradition in Maharashtra.

NOTES

1. LSB, III: 152.
2. Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam - An Introduction to Sufism* (Schocken Books: New York, 1975), p. 1.
3. Sharafuddin Maneri, trans. Paul Jackson. *The Hundred Letters* (Bombay: 1985), Foreword.
4. A recent addition is Carl W. Ernst, Ph.D. *Sufism* (Boston and London: Shambala Publications Inc., 1997), which gives a good overview of Sufism and its history.
5. Ranade, *Mysticism in India: The Poet Saints of Maharashtra* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), p. viii.
6. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, p. 3.
7. Victor Danner, "Islamic Mysticism" in *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Winter 1976, p. 32.
8. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, ed. N.J. Dawood (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969, p. 358.
9. Shems Friedlander, *The Whirling Dervishes, being an account of the Sufis of the Sufi Order known as Mevlavis and its founder* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), Introduction p. xx.
10. Ernst, *Sufism*, p. xiv
11. Ernst, *Sufism*, p. xii.
12. Ernst, *Sufism*, p. xii.
13. For further discussion on the etymology of the word Sufism, see *Encylopedia of Islam*, vol. 14 (Leyden: H.A.R. Gibb, 1934).
14. Ernst, *Sufism*, p. 23.
15. Victor Danner, "The Necessity for the Rise in the Term Sufi," *Studies in Comparative Religion* (Spring 1972), p. 71.
16. Ranade, *Mysticism in India*, p. viii.
17. J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 1.
18. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), p. 358.
19. Quoted in R.S.Bhatnagar, *Classical Dimensions of Sufi Thought*, p. 98.
20. Gardner, W.R.W., *Al-Ghazali* (Calcutta: Christian Literature for India, 1919), p. 43.
21. Nuruddin 'Abdur Rahman Jami, *Lawaih*, trans. E.H. Whinfield and Mirza Muhammad Kazvini (1928), p. 35.
22. Ernst, *Sufism*, p. 35.
23. DE, p. 230.
24. Richard Maxwell Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

25. Abu Nasr as-Sarraj, *The Kitab al-Luma ' fi't-tasawwuf*, ed. and trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (London: Luzac and Co, 1914), hereafter referred to by the abbreviation AS.
26. Ali ibn 'Uthman, *The Kashf al-Mahjub - The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism* (The Unveiling of the Veiled), trans. Reynold A Nicholson (Delhi: Taj Company, 1991), hereafter referred to by the abbreviation HU. These early works on Sufism were translated in the first part of this century into English by Reynold A. Nicholson, and have given scholars a clearer understanding of the original foundations of *tasawwuf*.
27. AS, Introduction, p. v.
28. This is elaborated upon in Part II ch. 9.
29. LSB, III:172.
30. CS, No. 72A.
31. HU, p. 210.
32. R.A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, p. 78.
33. *Qur'an* 10:63
34. HU, p. 212.
35. SSG, p. 22.
36. Rumi, *Mathnavi*, 5:2345
37. Rumi, *Mathnawi*, 2:3325
38. Nicholson, *Studies*, pp. 77-78.
39. Friedlander, *The Whirling Dervishes*, p. 39.
40. DE, p.17.
41. Meher Baba, ed., D.E. Stevens *Listen Humanity*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1957. p. 245.
42. Meher Baba, *Listen Humanity*, p. 249.
43. Meher Baba, *Listen Humanity*, Appendix II, p. 244.
44. C.B. Purdom, *The Perfect Master: Shri Meher Baba*. London: Williams & Norgate Ltd., 1937. pp. 25-7.
45. Meher Baba, *Sahavas: In the Company of God*. Pune: Meher Era Publications, 1977, p. 43.
46. Meher Baba, *Sahavas*, p. 46.
47. Irene Conybeare, *In Quest of Truth or How I Came to Meher Baba*, Kakinda, A.P.: Swami Satya Prakash Udaseen, 1962, p. 223.
48. Schimmel, *Mystical*, p. 200.
49. HU, p. 228.
50. Schimmel, *Mystical*, p. 205.
51. HU, pp. 225-6.
52. SSG, p. 44.
53. Narasimhaswami, *Devotees' Experiences*, pp. 15-17.
54. Schimmel, *Mystical*, p. 207.
55. SSG, p. 43.
56. SSG. p. 42.
57. Schimmel, *Mystical*, p. 206

58. HU, p. 235.
59. LSB, II: 51
60. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, p. 32.
61. Jalaluddin Rumi, *Mathnaw-i Ma'nawi*, ed. and trans. Reynold A. Nicholson. 6 vols. (London: 1925-40), III, 588.
62. SSG, p. 10.
63. CS, No. 19.
64. CS, No. 178.
65. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, p. 140.
66. Subhan, *Sufism: Its Saints and Shrines*, p. 88.
67. It is Das Ganu's association of 'Venku' with Lord Venkateswara of Tirupati, that has distorted the issue and caused the *Sufi* connection to be neglected. A new theory of the identity of Venkusha is offered in Part III, The Sathya Sai Connection.
68. Sai Sharan Anand, *Shri Sai the Superman*, p. 17.
69. According to Imambai Chota Khan, 'Baba knew Arabic'. *Devotees' Experiences*, p. 278.
70. Maulana Abdurrahman Jami. *Nafahat al-uns*. Edited by M. Tauhidipur. Tehran, 1336 sh./1957, quoted in Schimmel, p. 122.

CHAPTER THREE

The Historical Background: Sufism in Maharashtra

It has been said that 'the *Sufis* molded the religious life of Maharashtra'[1], but perhaps it would be more correct to say that an upsurge of *bhakti* - an intense devotion to God, has molded the spirituality of the Deccan. Beginning in the late-twelfth and early-thirteenth centuries, there arose two independent devotional movements within the Maharashtrian religious milieu, on the one hand a localized *bhakti* thrust centred on the worship of the deity Vitthala in Pandharpur - and on the other, the arrival of Islamic mystics termed *Sufis* who came from Persia and Arabia to the Deccan during the medieval period. Intense love for God was the emotional impetus behind both of these groups, and it is the similarity of their thought and practice, albeit expressed through a different language and cultural medium, that drew them close to each other. This symbiotic relationship was eventually to be reflected centuries later in the teachings of Sai Baba. The devotion to Vitthala grew over the next few centuries, and became part of the pan-Indian *Bhakti movement* through the abhangas and kirtans of the numerous poet-saints, the most popular being Jnaneshvar, Namdev, Eknath, and Tukaram, who are highly revered in Maharashtra to this day. Meanwhile the *Sufi* mystics had also established their Orders in the Deccan in centres like Hyderabad, Gulbarga, Bijapur, Khuldabad, Aurangabad and other smaller places, and were making their presence known with hospices called *khanqahs*. Over the centuries, when noted *Sufi pirs* died, elaborate *dargahs* or large domed tombs were built in their memory, where the power of the saint, known as his *baraka*, was felt to be still present. These *dargahs*, albeit in ruins, are still an outstanding feature of the landscape of Maharashtra. Love of God was the dominant theme for both groups - devotion to God as Vitthala for the *bhaktas*, and to God as *Allah* for the *Sufis*.

According to Ranade, the Middle Ages in India was a period when mysticism was being brought out from the cloister and introduced into the marketplace for the first time and the mystic 'mixed with the ordinary run of mankind, with sinners, with pariahs, with women, with people who cared not for the spiritual life.'[2] Mystics represent factions in society who reject the formalism and ritualism of rigid orthodoxy, relying exclusively on their own direct experience of God. To them, the personal goal of God-realization is more important than rigidly following an orthodox dogma. While saints may be said to have spiritually transcended worldly affairs, on the material plane they also have to interact within their political period, religious milieu and social situation. Ranade, in his classic text, *Mysticism in India*, collected many of the writings, poetry and songs of the great Maharashtrian mystics through the centuries, and found that while the core mystic experience is very similar, it has always been coloured by the prevailing religious, cultural and political situation of a region.[3] For example, Jnanadev living at the end of the thirteenth century in the Deccan did not have to cope with the invading Muslims, but his contemporary, Namdev, who survived him by more than fifty years, did, and his mysticism and poetic verses inevitably reflect this changed social and political environment. Similarly the *Sufi* poet-saints found themselves to be minorities in a predominantly Hindu environment, thus colouring their language and expression.

Both aspects of the scenario just described - the bringing of mysticism to the common man, and an accommodation to the current socio-political milieu - apply to the mystic Sai Baba who rejected any formal or sectarian religious approach, almost to the point of being heterodox in his behaviour. His one-pointed goal was to experience God, and having attained God-realization, to show the way for others. All manner of people came for Sai Baba's *durbar*, rich, poor, high-caste Brahmans, low castes and harijans, women, businessmen, criminals, Pleaders at Law, policemen, entertainers - to name a few. So mysticism was brought into the public domain, but not everyone was attracted to Sai Baba for spiritual reasons, although Sai Baba had a way of drawing people to him, and fulfilling their wishes in order to then spiritually elevate them. Like earlier mystics of the Deccan, we will enquire how far Sai Baba and his teaching reflected the political, social and religious atmosphere of his period. Sai Baba was born and spent all his life in the area of the Deccan now known as Maharashtra, so there are certain questions that must be addressed: how far Sai Baba's spiritual advent in Maharashtra in western India in the nineteeth and the first two decades of the twentieth centuries can be seen as a unique appearance unrelated to place and time; to what extent his life and teaching can be seen as a culmination and continuity of the historical spiritual milieu of Maharashtra; and whether his life and teaching emerged out of the tolerance and symbiosis of the *bhakti* and *Sufi* movements that existed at the folk level in Maharashtra. This chapter examines the historical context surrounding Sai Baba, and shows that Sai Baba's life and teachings did indeed reflect the long-established spiritual ethos of Maharashtra.

The Deccan and Modern Maharashtra

Much of the geography of the modern State of Maharashtra - a word which literally means 'the great country' - is dominated by the large Deccan plateau, an old basalt lava plain which has weathered to form a rich black soil. The Western Ghats, also known as the Sahyadri Range of mountains, run north-south dividing the Konkan coast from the Deccan plateau. They rise steeply from the west coast to an elevation of more than 3000 feet, and then slope gently down towards the east, the range being broken up by various rivers such as the Godavari, Bhima and Krishna and their tributaries. The rivers Narbada and Tapti define the northern border of the plateau, and throughout history have formed a formidable barrier, which has resulted in a distinct cultural and historical region known as the Deccan. The name *Deccan* or *Dakkhan* is a vernacular corruption of the Sanskrit, *daksina*, meaning southern, used to indicate the region south of Narbada river, which in ancient times was part of *daksinadesa* - the country to the south.[4] The Godavari river is traditionally considered by the Hindus to be one of the seven holy rivers of India, and, according to Joshi, it is mentioned in medieval literature and Indo-Persian chronicles as the holy Ganga as an indication of its sacredness.[5] Along its banks are found towns and villages with such names as Gangapur and Gangakhed. It is interesting to note that Sai Baba constantly referred to the Godavari river as the 'Ganga' and to its waters as the holy Ganges. Both Shirdi in the Ahmadnagar district and Pathri in the Parbhani district lie to the east of the Ghats and so miss much of the wet monsoon which falls to their west. As a result they are relatively dry areas with thorn, acacia (*babul*) and scrub jungle.[6] All these factors combine to be agriculturally conducive to the cultivation of sugar-cane, which is today an important crop in the economy of the Shirdi region.

Maharashtra has been a state of India with today's boundaries only since 1960. However, in the first half of the nineteenth century the administration of this Mahratta region was divided into the Bombay Presidency which was under British rule, and the Nizam's Dominions which were independent, although under British protection (*see* the map in Appendix B). Shirdi, the village in which Sai Baba chose to spend the latter sixty years of his life, was located in the Bombay Presidency, but his generally accepted birthplace of Pathri, a few hundred kilometres east of Shirdi, was in the Nizam's Dominions. In 1960, the Province of Bombay was divided up along linguistic lines between the Gujarati-speaking state of Gujarat and the Marathi-speaking state of Maharashtra. Maharashtra is composed of three distinct regions, Western Maharashtra, Marathwada and Vidharba. Marathwada, which literally translates as 'the home of the Marathi-speaking people', is a roughly triangular area embraced by Nasik in the west, Sholapur in the south and Akola in the north. As far as can be determined, Sai Baba, as a youth, travelled from Pathri, west along the Godavari river, and wandered for a few years around

Marathwada, which includes within its parameters the cities of Aurangabad, Parbhani, Osmanabad, Bidar and Nanded.[7] There are a number of references to Sai Baba being in the vicinity of Aurangabad in his youth, and the earliest reliable reference to his pre-Shirdi life given in his biography locates him in the remote village of Dhoop or Dhoopkeda in the Nizam's Dominions, about 15 miles south of Aurangabad.[8] There he stayed with the Muslim family of Chand Patil. Another clue in connecting Sai Baba with Marathwada is provided by delving into the family history of some friends whom he visited or was visited by on a regular basis - as often as every eight to ten days - in Rahata, a neighbouring market village a few miles from Shirdi. The name Khushalchandseth or shet crops up three times in the Marathi *Sri Sai Saccarita*[9], and V.B. Kher made some investigations in the early 1980's into this Rahata Marwadi and his family who were landlords and merchants.[10] In Maharashtra, the term '*shet*' suffixed to a name denotes a rich man or merchant carrying on a trade or business, and this was the term used by Dabholkar in the *Sri Sai Saccarita*. In Gujarat and North India it would more likely be spelt '*seth*', whereas the Muslim spelling would be '*sait*'. Sai Baba was evidently very fond of Chandrabhanshet and his nephew Khushalchandshet. Chandrabhan and Sai Baba must have been contemporaries, while his nephew, although much younger, features more in the biography, since the uncle, who died in 1911, was probably unknown to Dabholkar. According to Kher they belonged to a Rajasthani family called 'Sand', who migrated to Maharashtra and operated various businesses under the name of 'Shivaram Ramchandra Sand' until 1928. They owned land in various places, ginning factories, cotton warehouses and money-lending establishments in Ahmednagar, and had *Hundi* (financial) businesses in Selu and Jalna.[11] Kher surmises through conversations with the family, that this family must have been known to Sai Baba when he was young in the Parbhani region, and that soon after he came to Shirdi the second time with the Chand Patil wedding party, he toyed with the idea of living in Rahata when Chandrabhan Seth offered him a place called '*Pawarwada*' as a residence, which was owned by the Sand family. Sai Baba decided against it in favour of living in Shirdi. There must have been a life-long friendship between Sai Baba and Chandrabhan spanning more than 60 years, with regular informal visits which continued with the nephew after the death of Chandrabhan in 1911. Later these visits took on the air of a more formal festive occasion with bands and music, pomp and ceremony.[12] Swami Sai Sharan Anand also describes such a visit in his autobiography, when he accompanied Sai Baba to the house of Khushalchand Seth.[13]

Marathwada, being situated in the middle of India, is strategically important both politically and militarily, and became a cultural melting pot. While the Nizam himself was Muslim, the percentage of Muslims in the population of his Dominions was under 10 percent with the remaining 90 percent being Hindu; in Marathwada Hindus constitute nearly 96 percent of the population.[14] While the Nizams ruled Marathwada from 1724 to 1948, the language of administration was Urdu. Dabholkar in his *Sri Sai Saccarita* informs us that Sai Baba spoke Urdu and he occasionally quotes Sai Baba's statements in broken Urdu albeit using Devanagari script.[15] Gunaji, on the other hand, gives no indication that Sai Baba ever spoke Urdu. The fact that Sai Baba discoursed in Urdu to Abdul, his Muslim servitor, is well attested by the notebook the latter kept[16], although with the arrival of visitors from Bombay in his later years, he spoke in the local language of Marathi.[17] Sai Baba chose the Marathi-speaking village of Shirdi, which was located in the Bombay Presidency, as his permanent place of residence from around 1858. Shirdi, today as then, is in the Kopergaon Taluka in the District of Ahmadnagar, but being a rural backwater was of no great importance to the British raj except for an occasional visit of a revenue officer towards the end of Sai Baba's life, attracted by rumours that large amounts of money were being gifted to the saint by his devotees as *dakshina*.[18]

The area of Marathwada has had a diverse religious as well as cultural history since ancient times, as revealed by the Buddhist, Hindu and Jain temples in the region. The Godavari valley, sometimes called the 'cradle of Maharashtra', formed part of the ancient *Dandakaranya* - the Dandaka Forest - the area featured in the *Puranas* as 'the most charming on earth'.[19] There is little known history prior to the advent of the Mauryas (321 BC to 184 BC) when this area became Buddhist and to a lesser degree Jain. With the decline of the Mauryas, the Satavahanas claimed power, making their capital city Pratisthana (now known as Paithan) on the banks of the Godavari. Bhandarkar comments that at the time of the Satavahanas, 'Brahmanism also flourished side by side with Buddhism', indicating a tolerance of different religions even at this early period.[20] With the decline of the Satavahanas various kingdoms ruled, and under their auspices many of the Buddhist caves were carved out and painted at Ajanta. The Hindu dynasty of the Chalukyas arose in 489 AD lasting until 760, and under their aegis the Kailas Temple at Ellora was cut out of the sheer rock face. It was under the early Chalukyan princes that the Jaina religion came into prominence in the southern part of Marathwada. As Buddhism declined, Brahmanism again flourished and temples were built to honour the Hindu gods Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshvara. The Chalukyas were tolerant of all religions like their predecessors. The Rastrakutas then took power and more Buddhist caves were cut and painted with scenes of the past lives of the Buddha. The Chalukyas regained power in 973 and ruled until 1180 when their empire split and the Yadavas seized power, making Devagiri their capital. It was this period that produced some of the greatest poet-saints of Maharashtra such as Jnanesvar, Namdev, and Mukundaraj. Thus three great religions had made their mark within the confines of Marathwada: Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism. Three years after Jnanesvar completed his *Jnanesvari*, a fourth religion - Islam - was to begin to make inroads into the religious life of Marathwada.[21]

Both geographically and culturally Maharashtra lies between northern India and the southern peninsula. The Vindhya and Satpura mountains and the two rivers Narbada and Tapti together form a barrier dividing north from south, which acted as a deterrent to would-be external invaders from the north prior to the end of the thirteenth century. In 1296, Ala-uddin Khilji was the first of many subsequent Muslim invaders of Maharashtra to breach this barrier, raiding Devagiri, the famous Yadava fortress, and looting much of that city's wealth. This marked the beginning of Muslim entry into the Deccan and its subsequent penetration, and in fact the history of the Deccan may be said to reflect the history of Islam in India. In 1327, holding the reins of power in Delhi, the Sultan Muhammad Tughluq made a bold decision to move his political capital from Delhi to the Deccan. The place he chose was was the spectacular Yadava fortress built on top of a very prominent cone-shaped hill jutting up from the Deccan plains known as Devagiri -'the mountain of the gods', and gave it a new Persian name of Daulatabad. He believed that Muslims and *Sufis* would gradually convert the Deccan to Islam and thus advance his own authority.[22] Politically, this experiment proved to be a failure, and the capital eventually returned to Delhi, but not before the roots of both *Sufi* and Muslim culture were firmly established in the Deccan. When the central authority in Delhi eventually disintegrated, numerous independent Muslim states arose all over India, and the Bahmani Kingdom centred in Gulbarga ruled the Deccan. At the eventual break-up of this dynasty, five Muslim kingdoms arose, centred in strategic towns in Maharashtra: Qutb Shahi in Golconda, Adil-Shahi in Bijapur, Nizam-Shahi in Ahmadnagar, Barid Shahi in Bidar, and the Imad Shahi in Berar. Today, Marathwada still retains much evidence of its medieval Islamic connections in these place-names, along with Aurangabad, Khuldabad, Daulatabad and Jafarabad, as well as its profusion of old mosques, forts and tombs.

The Nizam-Shahi Kingdom was founded and built by Ahmed Nizam Shah in 1494, and his capital was named Ahmednagar (Ahmed's town) after him, and this kingdom provides a good example of a growing syncretism between Hindus and Muslims that occurred in subsequent years. Ahmed Nizam Shah himself was a Brahman convert to Islam. His grandfather was the *kulkarni* (accountant/registrar) of Pathri in Marathwada.[23] Many of Ahmed

Nizam Shah's Hindu relatives came to join him from Pathri.[24] His father Malik Hasan had earlier been captured by Bahmani troops and taken to Bidar where the Sultan of that region recognised his abilities, and later converted him to Islam. In time he was promoted to the position of Governor of a Bahmani province, and when the Bahmani Kingdom eventually split, his son Ahmed founded the dynasty of Ahmednagar. However, the family never forgot its original hometown of Pathri, and planned to annex it to their acquisitions in Ahmednagar. Unfortunately there were other kingdoms in between, so there was great local opposition to this plan and Pathri was strongly fortified by the building of a fortress and encircled by great walls. The ruins of the fort are still in evidence and the author was shown the more solid sections of the walls which are still being lived in to this day. In 1518 Pathri was captured on behalf of the Nizam Shah who deviously succeeded in annexing it, and for many years after it became a military pawn in the battles between the rival Muslim factions.[25] The author was also shown a small *dargah* there which must have originally been a Hindu temple prior to the early sixteenth century, for when the plaster wall-coverings were removed a few years ago, original carvings of Hindu motifs were discovered on the stone pillars inside. Possibly due to the Brahman antecendents of Ahmed Nizam Shah, he and his Muslim descendants were much more religiously tolerant than many of the other Muslim kings.[26] Many of their Hindu relatives were raised to high positions, and Gadre notes that due to the more tolerant atmosphere, most of the sixteenth century *sants* (mystic poets) came from the kingdom of Ahmednagar.[27] The legacy of the Nizam Shahi Dynasty was a period of tolerance and understanding between Hindus and Muslims in this part of the Deccan.

The *Moglai* or Mughal town of Pathri is particularly interesting to us, as it is now accepted as the place of birth of Sai Baba, and has a long rich history, with roots reaching back to ancient times. According to the Maharashtra State Gazetteer it has epic connections being 'held as the same as Parthpuri founded by Partha or Arjuna, the hero of *Mahabharat* and the third

Pandav.'[28] In Medieval times the District of Parbhani including Pathri was part of the Yadava Kingdom ruled from Devagiri located about 85 miles north-west from Pathri. The nineteenth century emergence of Sai Baba in the region of Pathri, with a syncretic message of tolerance between Hinduism and Islam, can be seen as a modern continuation of the Nizam Shahi tradition.

Pathri, although a Muslim political pawn, was not ignored by the *Sufis*. In the fifteenth century a number of Qadiri *Sufis* arrived in Marathwada, the descendants of Shah Nimatu'llah Qadiri being the first of this Order to enter India. Although the Qadiriyya Order was one of the earliest *Sufi silsilas* in Arab lands, it was late coming to India and the Deccan. The Chishtiyya and Suhrawardiyya *Sufi* Orders had already established a powerful presence in the Deccan since the fourteenth century. In 1482 Syed Shah Abu Muhammed Husain Qadiri built a hospice, called a *khanqah*, a *masjid* and a school called a *madrasah* at Pathri, where it grew into an important *Sufi* centre.[29] In the late sixteenth century the Qadiriyya Order sent more *pirs* to the Deccan, who established *khanqahs* in Bidar, Khandesh, Burhanpur, and Ahmednagar. In 1590 the Qadiri saint Syed Shah Jamai from Baghdad came and settled in Warangal, from whence the Biyabani *silsila* grew, the descendants of which appear later in the story. During the succeeding centuries many more Qadiri centres sprang up in Marathwada, and on this researcher's own visit to Pathri, I was informed by a Muslim doctor that as many as forty saints called *awliya* and four *qutbs,* those who had attained the highest spiritual states, were buried in Pathri. Even today sixty percent of the population is Muslim and it is not surprising that Pathri's rich Muslim *Sufi* heritage is the environment which nurtured Sai Baba in his early years.

The Maharashtra State Gazetteer reports that there are five Muslim *Sufi dargahs* in Pathri, most dating back to the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries. The most important *dargah* is that of Sayyad Sadat, also known as Aminuddin Shah Rafayi, which is jointly constructed with a *masjid* and has four *minarets*. His *urs* festival is very popular in the region, and in 1967 it was reported that it attracted up to 40,000 people, Hindus as well as Muslims.[30] The same doctor said that it had become traditional that the president of the Ganesa Festival in Pathri be chosen from the Muslim community, and the President of the *urs* of Sayyad Sadat be chosen from the Hindu community.

Ahmed Shah patronized the sport of wrestling, called *kusti*, which then became popular thereafter throughout Maharashtra.[31] In 1897, when the *urs* festival was initiated in honour of Sai Baba, wrestling matches were an essential feature of the program. Also, according to the hagiography, when Sai Baba was a young man there was in the village of Shirdi a Muslim wrestler called Mohdin Tamboli. Sai Baba, who we are informed at this time 'dressed like an athlete',[32] evidently had a wrestling match with Tamboli, and upon losing the match started to wear the *kafni* and *langot*, with a piece of white cloth wrapped around his head, the *Sufi* mode of dress with which we associate him today.

The Muslim population in the new Ahmednagar was composed of three groups: converts to Islam called *dakhani* Muslims; new-comers from Arabia, Persia, Turkey and Syria, all of fair complexion; and Habshis from Ethiopia, of dark complexion. The newcomers brought all forms of engineering skills, architecture and artistry. They also brought great learning, especially Shi'a philosophy. The Nizam Shahi kings were great patrons of learning and, although the official language was Persian, by the end of the fourteenth century a language called '*dakhani*' was emerging in the Deccan from a combination of Persian, Arabic and Marathi. This formed the basis of the later Deccani Urdu language.

The five Muslim kingdoms, after blossoming for some centuries, were all in turn conquered by the Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb. After Aurangzeb's death, the Mughal Dynasty declined and Asaf Jah, a noble at the Delhi court was appointed Governor of the Deccan. As a dedicated Muslim, Asaf Jah decided one day to stop in Aurangabad to visit a local *darvish (faqir)*. The story goes that the *darvish* had only a few pieces of dry bread to offer the Governor, but he, out of respect for the *darvish*, duly ate seven pieces. On giving his blessings as he left, the *darvish* prophesied that Asaf Jah's dynasty would prosper for seven generations. Incredibly, history records that there were indeed seven generations of Nizams in the Asaf Jah Dynasty. The last and seventh Nizam, Mir Usman Ali Khan acceded his kingdom to the State of India in 1948. Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah I declared independence from the Mughals and established a separate kingdom in 1724, after which Hyderabad developed into an important Muslim centre. Asaf Jah was sensitive to the fact that the population distribution of his Muslim state was a mere 10 percent Muslim, compared to 90 percent Hindu, and thus was tolerant of other faiths. The first five Nizams continued this policy of tolerance. However, when Mahboob Ali Khan became the sixth Nizam in 1884, the situation changed and he began a pro-Islam policy by which he began imposing restrictions on Hindu festivals which were not applied equally to Muslim festivals. He declared the Nizam's Dominions to be an Islamic State, and unofficially encouraged the conversion of Hindus to Islam. This policy, which was continued by the seventh Nizam, was to spark great unrest and communal rioting in subsequent years.[33]

Having been born in Pathri in Marathwada, then under the control of the Nizam, and having spent a number of years travelling around the area, Sai Baba chose to settle permanently in an area just outside of the Nizam's jurisdiction. Is it possible that he had intimations that the religious atmosphere would change due to Mahboob Ali's Islamicization policy, and that there would be much communal unrest? We will never know for sure but we do know that Sai Baba taught universal truths, and was against conversion from one faith to another. He taught respect and tolerance for all religious paths. It may have been a strategic choice on Sai Baba's part to settle as close to his native place as possible without being under the influence of the Nizam's regime.

Hindu society has traditionally been noted for its tolerance towards new religious ideas, often assimilating, absorbing and synthesizing them. When Islam entered India by conquest at the beginning of the fourteenth century, however, it was observed that on meeting the indigenous Hindu tradition, 'the two religions had no points of contact with each other'.[34] *Hinduism*, having no central authority, perforce allowed great flexibility in individual modes of worship. However, this tolerance did not transfer to Indian social organisation, where a rigid caste system governed all aspects of life. It was soon to become apparent that in Muslim culture, the reverse was true; religion and worship were highly structured and formalized, but social organisation was extremely flexible and caste-less. This antipathy between social and religious values was the underlying cause of much communal upset and even violence. As a response to this situation there arose a number of *bhakti* movements or sects, who embraced a monotheistic stance, advocating devotion to one personal deity, and who also discarded caste discrimination amongst themselves. This development was due to the inflluence of the *Sufi* mystics who began to spread over the Deccan. Nizami identifies these two key notions preached by the *Sufis* as *tauhid* - unity of God and the equality and brotherhood of man.[35]

Long before the Muslim armies invaded Maharashtra, some Muslim missionaries and *Sufi* saints had come to the West coast by sea to settle as early as the eighth century, and gathered clusters of devotees.[36] Nizami concludes that while there was a small Muslim presence in coastal Maharashtra before the close of the thirteentth century,[37] the year 1300 AD was pivotal for the advent of Sufism in the Deccan. In those opening years of the fourteenth century the head of the Chishtiyya Order, the *Sufi* Khwaja Nizam al-Din Awliya in Delhi, wished to spread the Chishti message to new parts of India. He sent his disciple Khwaja Muntajib al-Din (Zar Zari Zar-Bakhsh) to Maharashtra in the south, along with an entourage of 700 *Sufi* divines. Facts beyond this point merge into legend, although according to the hagiography he arrived first at Devagiri and later settled at Khuldabad a few miles away, where he established a *Sufi* presence which was to grow in importance in the following centuries. The *dargah* of Zar Zari Zar-Bakhsh is the most impressive one in Khuldabad (*see* Plate 15), and his *urs* festival attracts thousands of visitors every year even today. His eighteenth century biographer, Sabzawari, notes that Hindus and Muslims alike participated in the his annual *urs* festival.[38] This is typical of many *dargahs* of *Sufi*-Muslim saints in Maharashtra, where the Hindu population reveres the memory of the saint equally with Muslim devotees. Kulkarni cites a study of folklores based on fieldwork in Marathwada, showing a history of cultural fusion between Hindu and Muslim communities, which still survives.[39] He comments:

> This survey shows how Hindus have been traditionally worshipping the *pirs*, participating in Muharam festival, *urs*, praying and vowing for something, offering eatables to the *pirs*, fasting for the *pir*, etc. The *pirs* of that region like Ramlal, Fakirbaba, Shaikh Marubaba, Bhikansha Baba have been immortalized by women folk in their songs passed on from generation to generation by oral tradition, and sung even now in many homes in villages from Marathwada while performing their domestic duties.[40]

This Marathwada case study highlights how the mingling of the two communities for religious occasions was accepted in Maharashtra, and thus illustrates how this same phenomenon could easily occur in Shirdi for the *urs* of Sai Baba. The Shirdi *urs* festival, although uncompromisingly Muslim during its early years from 1897-1912, was equally enthusiastically embraced by the Hindus. By agreeing to the amalgamation of the Hindu *Ramnavami* festival with the *urs* in 1912, Sai Baba reinforced the earlier *Sufi* initiative for cooperation, symbiosis and tolerance.

One of the foremost *Sufi* centres in Marathwada was at Khuldabad, about twenty miles from Aurangabad, not far from the rock-cut Kailas temple at Ellora. Originally called Rawza, the village was renamed Khuldabad (from *khuld-makan* meaning 'whose place is eternity'), in honour of the Emperor Aurangzeb after his death and burial there in the year 1707. In the 1880 Nizam's Gazetteer, the importance of Khuldabad as a *Sufi* centre was highlighted, by being described as the *Kerbella of Dekhan Mussulmans*, likening it to one of Shi'i Islam's most sacred pilgrimage centres.[41] The first two heads of the Chishtiyya Order in Maharashtra were brothers. According to legend, Nizam al-Din, head of the Chishtiyya Order in Delhi sent Khwaja Muntajib (Zar Zari Zar-Bakhsh) with 700 *Sufi* divines on a missionary expedition to Maharashtra. Some years later, Nizam al-Din turned to Burhan al-Din Gharib and asked whether his brother who headed that mission was older or younger. By this Burhan surmised that his brother Zar Zari Zar-Bakhsh was dead, which must have been in 1309, his known death date. Nizam al-Din then conferred the authority or *wilayat* of Maharashtra upon Burhan and sent him to take over the Chishtiyya Order there.[42] Indeed there is a small mosque situated on the top of the hill behind Khuldabad called Mosque of the Fourteen Hundred Saints.[43] Khuldabad is filled with the huge domed *dargahs* of eminent *Sufis,* which silently attest in their albeit ruined state to the fact that there has been a very strong *Sufi* presence in this area of Marathwada in the past.[44]

In the *Saibaba MS*, the list of outstanding Masters of the Chishtiyya Order is given in detail, as taught to Abdul. It includes the name of Nasir al-Din Mahmud, who is popularly known as Chiragh-i Dihli (Lamp of Delhi) with his disciple Sayyid Muhammad bin Yusuf al-Husaini, known as Gesu Daraz (He with the long tresses of hair). Gesu Daraz moved to Maharashtra with his father in 1325 when he was four years old, at the time when Sultan bin Muhammad Tughluq was planning to move his capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. The eventual enforced move which came in 1328-29 proved to be a landmark date in the Chishtiyya Order, for many *Sufis* of this Order moved to Maharashtra at that time. When the capital was eventually moved back to Delhi again, many of the original *Sufis* refused to go back and stayed on in Daulatabad. Gesu Daraz returned to Delhi to study with Chiragh-i Dilhi but later returned to settle in Gulbarga. His father, Sayyid Yusuf al-Husaini Raju Qattal, died in Khuldabad and his *dargah* is located at the bottom of the Hoda hill. The *dargah* of Khwaja Gesu Daraz is in Gulbarga and built of white stone, is very large and impressive. Gesu Daraz is of special interest as he was one of the first Chishti masters to attempt to understand the Hindu epics and learn Sanskrit in order to debate with the Brahmans. This *Sufi* pattern of reaching out to the Hindus, and also Hindus to Muslims, is typical of the Maharashtrian saints. In fact a modern-day tourist guide to Bidar near Hyderabad, specifically mentions this in reference to the tomb of Ahmad Shah Bahmani, the founder of the Bahmani kingdom:

> The holiness of the shrine is such that it has always attracted Hindu as well as Muslim votaries. In this connection it is significant that the *Sufic* inscriptions which line the walls and ceiling are expressions of a philosophy which bears a very close resemblance to a certain type of Mysticism known as "*bhakti*".[45]

Visitors to the *dargah* of Zar Zari Zar Bakhsh are also shown a cave high on Hoda Hill in which the saint is traditionally said to have meditated in the thirteenth century (*see* Plate 16).[46] It is quite a large dry cave which today has a walled entrance, and is high enough inside to sit comfortably. When Meher Baba, the twentieth century *Sufi* master,[47] took a group of his disciples in 1952 to Khuldabad, he pointed out the cave commenting that this same cave was also used by Sai Baba for meditation when he was a young man[48], and that he practised severe asceticism there for a number of years.[49] Naosherwan Anzar, a disciple of Meher Baba further recalls:

> Once on a visit to Ellora Caves, Meher Baba took his *mandali* [group] to a nearby small village named Khuldabad. Here on a hill stands the shrine of Zar-Zari-Zar-baksh [sic], who lived there 700 years ago. Baba asked his men to bow down and pay their respects at the shrine. Later Baba told them that Zar-Zari-Zar-baksh was a 'Perfect master' [*qutb*] and was the master of Sai Baba of Shirdi. Surprised at this revelation, one of the *mandali* asked Baba, how this was possible when Sai Baba lived in our time and the master lived 700 years ago. Baba then explained that Sai Baba had been a disciple of Zar-Zari-

> Zar-baksh in a previous incarnation. During that time Sai Baba served his master with love and devotion and the master's grace descended on him. This grace carried through Sai Baba's subsequent incarnations until he became the 'Perfect Master' we now know as Sai Baba.[50]

We know that Meher Baba had gone to Shirdi as a young man and had met Sai Baba, and was very much in touch with the *Sufi* milieu in the area. He established his own *ashram* of Meherabad only 60-70 miles from Shirdi, and thus would have access to information perhaps not available generally. Khuldabad itself is a similar distance from Shirdi. Sai Baba apparently had directed the young Merwan, as Meher Baba was then known, to go to Upasani Baba, who was then residing in the Khandoba temple in Shirdi, fasting and living naked under Sai Baba's guidance.[51] The testimony of Meher Baba and his disciples offer us tantalizing clues to a possible Chishti affiliation of Sai Baba. It is noteworthy that in the *Saibaba MS*, more attention is paid to the Chishtiyya Order than others; the name of Zar Zari Zar Bakhsh also appears in the list of Chishti saints. In the absence of further corroborating evidence, Sai Baba's Chishti connections must remain in the realm of conjecture.

Carl Ernst, in his recent study of Khuldabad, retells numerous legends which surround the enigmatic Zar Zari Zar Bakhsh.[52] One hagiographical story concerns a Hindu princess called Sona Bai who became a disciple of this saint:

> The story is told that her father, a Hindu chieftain, was the ruler of the country. When Muntajib al-Din arrived in Khuldabad and settled on Hoda Hill he sent a servant out to fetch water for ablutions. When the servant requested access to the well from an attendant, he was refused, but by good fortune Sona Bai happened to be passing by with her companions. Hearing that the already famous Zar Zari Zar-bakhsh was requesting water, she jestingly replied that he could have water as soon as the well turned to gold. When the servant returned to the saint and

> relayed the message, he replied "So be it", and instructed the servant to return, take some water and then place a handkerchief belonging to Zar Zari Zar-bakhsh in the well. The servant followed these orders, and Sona Bai watched in amazement as the water turned to flowing gold. She then understood the power of the God who could perform such a deed, went to meet the saint, and became his disciple. She and her family converted to Islam and she eventually became an adept mystic.[53]

At the annual *urs* festival of Zar Zari Zar Bakhsh a visit to the Sona Bai well is still an integral part of the celebrations. Ernst further notes that 'the saints of Khuldabad exerted an authority that was widely recognised in the region, in many cases through signs of miraculous power.'[54] Epithets given to them provide a clue as to their special power, such as that of Zar Zari Zar Bakhsh alluding to his role as 'giver of gold' or 'donor of the wealth of wealths', as illustrated in the above incident at the well. One of Sai Baba's miraculous *karamat* also involved a well - the incident occurred when an *urs* festival was being instituted in Shirdi in his honour. Although at that time there were two wells in Shirdi, one had dried up and the second had only brackish water. Expecting a large crowd of people, the organisers of the fair were desperate, so they appealed to Sai Baba for help. He thereupon went to the well and threw flowers into the brackish water, with the result that the water miraculously became sweet.[55]

The stories of individual *Sufi* saints possessing unique healing powers are many. Richard Eaton cites a number of such cases from his research in Bijapur.

> Some *dargahs* are specialized in that visits or pilgrimages to them are believed to grant certain wishes or alleviate certain ills of the devotee. The *dargah* of 'Abd al-Razzaq Qadiri, for example, is believed to work special powers in healing mental disorders. Similarly the tomb of Hamid Qadiri has a chain fixed on its gate that a sick person must pull five consecutive Thursdays in order to get well.[56]

In my own research in 1992, on a visit one Thursday to the *dargah* of Bannemiya Baba in Aurangabad, I saw many wailing women sitting in front of the entrance, some rolling around on the ground. I was told that the *dargah* of Bannemiya, a *Sufi-fakir* who died more than fifty years ago, was known to help alleviate insanity and mental afflictions, and patients flocked on Thursdays hoping for a cure through his *baraka* or divine power still said to be active from the tomb.

Many Hindus would visit a *dargah* of a *pir* or Muslim miracle-worker for cures and healing, and as Wagle points out, '*pir* worship of Hindus could be construed as a good example of Hindu accommodation of an essentially Muslim practice of India.'[57] *Sufi pirs*, even those deceased long ago, are highly venerated at *dargahs*, and requests for cures or help are still an accepted phenomenon. A good example comes from the hagiographical literature of the *Sufis*. In the fifteenth century a *Sufi pir* of the Chishtiyya Order called Abu-Masud, more familiarly known today as Davalmalak, was especially associated with the curing of eye diseases in both people and animals, particularly cattle. Within a century of his death in 1484, his reputation had spread throughout Maharashtra, and Hindus including Brahmins and Muslims believed in the powers of Davalmalak and went on pilgrimage to his shrine. On the outset of eye disease, in order to cure it, the Hindu believes he should immediately make a pilgrimage to the *dargah* of Davalmalak. He assumes the dress of a *Sufi* mendicant and begs for food on his way to the *dargah*. There he has to give gifts to the keeper of the shrine and prepare a feast called a *bhandara*.[58] He then hopes for a dream in which the spirit of Davalmalak will tell him that his eyes are healed and he can go home. The early seventeenth century poet-saint Eknath, drily commented upon the Hindus going to visit the shrine of such a Muslim *pir*:

> The people worship the begging bowl of Davalmalak.
> They become *faqirs* once a year.
> Having cured their eyes of their disease, they eat
> *malida* (a milk sweet) from the hands of a Turk.[59]

Shah Muni also comments that 'Brahmins go to Davalmak'[60], and even today members from all the Hindu castes as well as Muslims continue to make pilgrimages to Davalmalak's shrine.

Sai Baba was essentially no different from such a miracle-working *Sufi*, for in fact many Hindus as well as Muslim families and itinerant *faqirs* travelled to Shirdi in spite of difficult conditions, hoping for a cure for their various diseases or problems. The miraculous power for which Sai Baba was particularly associated, and which indeed brought him fame throughout Maharashtra as a miracle-worker, was his ability to grant offspring to previously childless couples. There are many examples in the biographies of Sai Baba, where a fruit or coconut was symbolically given to the woman by him with the instruction to bring the child thus born back to him for his blessing.[61] To be given a fruit such as a mango indicated a male child, while being given a tamarind fruit indicated a female offspring. An incident referred to as the *amra-lila*, or the mango miracle, is recounted thus. There was a man called Damu Anna who had no children by either of his wives, and according to his horoscope there was no prospect of any. Damu Anna, having come to Shirdi with great faith, was given four ripe mangoes by Sai Baba, and told to give them to his junior wife, saying that these four mangoes would give her four sons and four daughters. And evidently, in due course Sai Baba's prophecy came true.[62] According to Sai Baba's biographers, people came from far and wide to visit him craving for this boon. That Sai Baba had a widespread reputation for helping childless couples, is comfirmed in the *Saibaba MS* where it says, 'If someone says "I do not get a son", Sai Baba can grant him a child. This is one of his miraculous abilites. Even if you are not fated to have a child, Sai Baba can grant one through his blessings'.[63] On hearing Sai Baba's glowing reputation, a British District Revenue Collector and his wife, who were unable to have children, arrived one day by carriage in front of Sai Baba's *masjid* hoping for Sai Baba's blessing to have a child. Sai Baba decided to test the couple's devotion and humility and kept them waiting while he went off to beg for food. Feeling rather humiliated at being thus ignored, they angrily climbed back into the carriage and departed. Osborne drily comments that they remained childless.[64]

NOTES

1. Shankar Gopal Tulpule, *Mysticism in Medieval India* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1984), p. 1.
2. R.D. Ranade, *Mysticism in India: The Poet-saints of Maharashtra* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), p. 2.
3. Ranade, *Mysticism in India*, p. 2.
4. R.G. Bhandarkar, *Early History of the Deccan and Miscellaneous Historical Essays* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1983), p. 5.
5. P.M. Joshi, "Historical Geography of Medieval Deccan" in *History of Medieval Deccan (1295-1724)* ed. H.K. Sherwani and P.M. Joshi (Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1974), p. 15.
6. *Census of India, 1961*, IX: *Census Atlas* (Bombay: Maharashtra Census Office, 1972), p. 17.
7. D.N. Irani, ed., *Sai Baba: The Perfect Master* (Poona: Meher Era Publications, 1986), p. 31.
8. SSG, p. 23.
9. SS, chps. 8, 30 and 43.
10. V.B. Kher, "Shri Sai Baba and His Devotee Khushalchand Seth of Rahata", *Shri Sai Leela*, July 1987, p. 10.
11. Kher, "Shri Sai Baba and His Devotee Khushalchand Seth", p. 11.
12. SSG, p. 49.
13. Autobiography of Swami Sai Sharan Anand published posthumously in 1983 in Gujarati. The relevant passage is reprinted in V.B. Kher's article, see above.
14. P.V. Kate, *Marathwada under the Nizams (1724-1948)* (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1987), p. 161.
15. An example of this is the Marathi version of *Sri Sai Saccarita* 5:68, where Sai Baba says in Urdu, "The rewards of voluntary poverty are better than kingship, a thousand times better than being rich."
16. This notebook, known as the *Saibaba MS*, will be discussed in detail in later chapters.
17. DE, p. 231.
18. LSB, I:41.
19. *Brahma Purana* 27:43-4; *Matsya Purana* 114:37-39.
20. See Bhandarkar, *Early History of the Deccan*, for a comprehensive early history of the Deccan before the Muslim conquest.
21. Bhandarkar, *Early History of the Deccan*, p. 58.

22. Carl W. Ernst, *The Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Centre* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 113.
23. Pramod B. Gadre, *Cultural Archaeology of Ahmadnagar during Nizam Shahi Period: 1494-1632* (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corportaion, 1986), p. 179.
24. Gadre, *Nizam Shahi Period*, p. 180.
25. *Maharashtra State Gazetteer*, pp. 48-9.
26. Gadre, *Nizam Shahi Period,* p. 196.
27. Gadre, *Nizam Shahi Period,* p. 197. For example Saraswati Gangadhar, author of the *Gurucharitra* (1558), Janardhan Swami - guru of Eknath, Samarth Ramdas and Tukaram.
28. *Maharashtra State Gazetteer: Parbhani District* (Bombay: Government of Maharashtra Gazetteer Dept., 1967), p.582. It is interesting to note that Sri Sathya Sai Baba was born in a place called Puttaparthi, and one of his epithets is 'Parthipurisa'.
29. K.A. Nizami, "Sufi Movements in the Deccan" in *History of Medieval Deccan, (1295-1724)*, vol. 2, ed. H.K. Sherwani and P.M. Joshi (Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1974), p. 189.
30. *Maharashtra State Gazetteer*, pp. 582, 585.
31. Gadre, *Nizam Shahi Period*, p. 192.
32. SSG, p. 24.
33. For further details, see Kate, *Marathwada under the Nizams,* chapter 7.
34. Yusuf Husain, *Glimpses of Medieval Indian Culture* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1973), p. 1.
35. K.A. Nizami, *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century* (Aligarh: Aligarh Muslim University, 1961), p. 264.
36. *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, XI, 74:xiii, 216.
37. For further details see Nizami, "Sufi Movements in the Deccan".
38. Sabzawari, *Sawanih*, fols. 9a-b, quoted in Carl W. Ernst, *The Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Centre* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 238.
39. A.R. Kulkarni, *Social Relations in the Maratha Country (Medieval Period)*, Presidential Address, Medieval India Section, Indian History Congress, Jabalpur, December 1970 (Poona: Deccan College 1970).
40. Kulkarni, *Social Relations in the Maratha Country*, p. 13.
41. Syed Hossein Bilgrami and C. Willmott, *Historical and Descriptive Sketch of His Highness the Nizam's Dominions*, 2 Vols. (Bombay: The Times of India Steam Press, 1883-4), II:715.
42. *Fath al-awliya*, pp. 21-13, quoted in Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, p. 236.
43. The reason for this number is a mystery. Logically it should have been 700, after the *Sufi* divines.
44. See Ernst's *Eternal Garden*, for a comprehensive history of Khuldabad/ Rawsa.

45. *Hyderabad: The Dominions of His Exalted Highness the Nizam* (Secunderbad: H.E.H. The Nizam's State Railway, 1939).
46. Annemarie Schimmel alludes to her visit to this cave in her Foreword to Carl Ernst's recently published book *Eternal Garden*, p. xix.
47. Born Merwan Sherian Irani (1894-1969), he was given the name Meher Baba, meaning Compassionate Father, by a group of his disciples.
48. Ramjoo Abdulla, "Meher Baba's Fiery Life and External Activities Part 3," *The Awakener* (1953), 23.
49. Munsiff, "Hazrat Sai Baba of Shirdi," p. 51.
50. Naosherwan Anzar, ed., *The Ancient One: A Disciple's Memoirs of Meher Baba*, reprinted in D. N. Irani, ed., *Sai Baba the Perfect Master* (Poona: Meher Era Publications, 1986), p. 20.
51. The life-story of Meher Baba and his association with Upasani Baba is well documented in C.B. Purdom, *The God-Man* (Cresent Beach, S.C.: Sheriar Press, 1964); D.E. Stevens, *Listen Humanity* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co, 1957).
52. Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, pp. 236-7.
53. Quoted from Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, p. 237, from the story in Azad, *Rawzat al-awliya*, pp. 54-55.
54. Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, p. 233.
55. SSG, p. 33.
56. Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur*, p. 295.
57. N.K. Wagle, "Hindu-Muslim Interactions in Medieval Maharashtra" in *Hinduism Reconsidered*, ed. Gunther D. Sontheimer and Hermann Kelke (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1989), p. 61.
58. According to Dhere this may consist of a chicken or goat dinner. R.C. Dhere, *Musalman Marathi Samta kavi* (Pune: Jnanraj Prakashan, 1967), p. 164.
59. Quoted in R.C. Dhere, *Musalman Marathi Samta Kavi* (Pune: Jnanraj Prakasan, 1967), pp. 162-3.
60. Wagle in 'Hindu-Muslim Interaction', *Hinduism Reconsidered*, p. 62, notes that there are Brahmans in Maharashtra whose family name is *Davalbhakta* (Daval-devotees).
61. CS, in section on 'Helps (Blessings) for Issue,' pp. 231-7.
62. SSG, p. 132.
63. *Saibaba MS*, p. 55 [K83].
64. Osborne, *The Incredible Sai Baba*, pp. 37-39.

CHAPTER FOUR

Sai Baba - The Muslim Faqir

Annasaheb Dabholkar, the very orthodox Brahmin biographer of Sai Baba and author of the *Sri Sai Saccarita*, consistently refers to the saint as 'a Muslim f*aqir*', and records that Sai Baba by his own admission said "Although I have accepted the life of a *faqir*, I am without care. I have stayed in one place giving up all involvements and attachments."[1] Sai Baba is telling us in his mystic language that a *faqir* necessarily follows the *Sufi* admonition to practice *faqr*, which involves voluntary poverty and rejection of the world and worldly goals and pursuits, and here is emphatically stating that this was his path. Dabholkar admits that he knew very little about Islam and certainly even less about the subtle nuances and fine distinctions of the mystical path of Sufism, but he acknowledges Sai Baba's Muslim facets. However, if he observed that Sai Baba was less than an orthodox Muslim, being very spasmodic in his performance of the five pillars of Islam, the confession of faith (*shahada*), five-times-a-day prayers (*namaz* or *salat*), fasting (*sawn*), almsgiving (*zakat*), and pilgrimage (*hajj*) - he was probably right, for Sai Baba was distinctly unorthodox, to the point of heterodoxy. So, having acknowledged his Muslim status, Dabholkar then proceeded to interpret and write about Sai Baba's sayings, actions and miracles in a totally Hindu manner. Later authors followed his lead, so that any Muslim references then tended to be regarded as anomalies, as for example in Sai Sharan Anand's curious explanation given earlier, that 'if Baba had donned Mohamaden garb and adopted some Mohamaden ways of worship, it was to draw attention to the truth that everything is Brahman'[2] There is no denying that Dabholkar's Hindu interpretation is valid in its own way and has proved to be of great spiritual benefit to many devotees - so much so that his work is now regarded as sacred literature (*pothi*). But there are many subtle distinctions between orthodox Islam and Sufism - the latter being the experiential effort to gain spiritual insight, a vision of God or a total mergence and identity with God - a goal not present in orthodox Islam. It follows therefore, that a true understanding of Sai Baba must include his *Sufi* background. This chapter seeks to redress the balance. By collecting and collating the references to the Muslim-*Sufi* aspects of Sai Baba, we can see that a different and more meaningful picture emerges.

According to Bharadwaja, 'there were quite a good number of Moslems who considered Baba a great Moslem saint and who were graced by him accordingly'.[3] Another Muslim devotee, who also perceived Sai Baba to be a great *Sufi* mystic stated, 'Baba is undoubtedly a saint of vast power. 'Is' I say - saints according to Islamic tradition do not die. They pass from one state to another.'[4] This devotee picked on one of the most defining features of Sai Baba as a *Sufi* mystic, for he declared that he would not die, promising that he would still be present in some subtle form, to help devotees. For a millennium it has been a *Sufi* maxim that Islamic saints do not die but that their essential power (*baraka*) remains at their tombs, and this has been the rationale behind popular Islamic saint worship and the building of eleborate *dargahs* with their annual *urs* celebrations. In the famous eleven promises that Sai Baba left, four assure and affirm that he would still be present after his physical death to help devotees. It is because of this pragmatic help in the experience of innumerable devotees that worship of Sai Baba is currently enjoying such a renaissance. Elsewhere we have it plainly in Sai Baba's own words that he was from the Muslim tradition when, in sensing a Hindu devotee's reticence to come to visit a Muslim with the reputation of being a mad *faqir*, Sai Baba showered abuse on him, declaring, "I am a Moslem. Go and fall at the feet of Sandhu at Bhimashankar Temple."[5]

These are but three incidents which show that in the eyes of many Sai Baba was not only a Muslim but also a *Sufi*, following the mystic branch of Islam. On the other hand, if one makes a visit to the Shirdi *Samadhi Mandir* and Shrine of Sai Baba today, one gets the overwhelming impression that Sai Baba must have been a Hindu saint, venerated in the manner of a Hindu deity, with his large marble statue seated on an ornate silver throne, with regular Hindu rituals, *abhishekam, arthi* and *pujas* performed, and with the saint honoured at Hindu festivals such as *Ramnavami*. No Islamic features are to be seen, except Sai Baba's *masjid* and niche facing Mecca, where he lived for nearly six decades, and even that has little to suggest its Islamic origin.

Sai Baba has variously been interpreted - first Sai Baba and his teaching can be seen from a universal position, transcending the strictures of both Hinduism and Islam, and indeed a number of devotees recognized that he was above both.[6] This is ultimately correct for once he had attained God-realization any sectarian bias falls away, revealing the unity of all faiths and the Oneness of Divinity. Secondly, he can be seen as a Hindu or as 'neither Hindu nor Muslim', because the underlying ideas of Sufism and of the Hindu *Bhakti Movement* are very close. The Hindu-authored biographies of Sai Baba certainly depict him in the light of Vedanta and the Hindu sacred literature such as the *BhagavadGita* and *Upanisads*. But to fully understand Sai Baba, there is a third perspective - the more subtle *Sufi* perspective - apart from his outward Muslim status - which until now has not been given due consideration. When Sai Baba is approached from the inward mystical *Sufi* standpoint it soon becomes clear that this was his original point of departure. At a Conference on Sai Baba of Shirdi held in New Delhi recently, the author had been apprehensive that she would be presenting an unacceptable thesis that Sai Baba and his teaching were based in Sufism. However, it soon became clear that the speakers at the Conference accepted Sai Baba's Muslim origin and that it was not a big issue, at least among the official speakers. Nevertheless, until now, no in-depth study of Sai Baba has been undertaken from a *Sufi* standpoint.

The term *Sufi* rarely appears in the Sai Baba literature, but the term *faqir* had become synonymous with *Sufi* in India by the nineteenth century. It is therefore appropriate to refer to Sai Baba as a *Sufi* in its original sense, for, by his own admission he achieved the state of divine Union with God, termed by his biographers his 'Absolute mode'. Sufism honours this higher order of mystic with the title *awliya*. In our very first introduction to Sai Baba in the *Sri Sai Satcharita*, he is hailed by Chand Patil as one of the *awliya* after Sai Baba directs him to find his lost mare. In all humility however, when referring to himself Sai Baba used the term *faqir*. Derived from the Arabic word *faqr* which literally means poor, the term *faqir* has the added spiritual connotation of poverty undertaken voluntarily for a higher purpose, rather than poverty as an unfortunate condition of life. Sai Baba confirms this, saying: 'The *faqir* life [of poverty] is the real royalty; it retains its status forever. Riches are transient.'[7]

Renunciation and poverty were key *Sufi* practices, and the life of Sai Baba can be shown to mirror the original early *Sufi* asceticism, as revealed by Nicholson through his translations of the early writers on Sufism. His outward mein was unworldly, eschewing the comforts which others think normal, eating only what was given to him through begging not cognizant of flavour or taste, and wearing his clothes until they became rags. According to Ramgiri Bua, Sai Baba 'had long hair flowing down to his buttocks' when he arrived in Shirdi.[8] The young Sai Baba was seen 'dressed as an athlete' and had never had his head shaved.[9] Only after losing his wrestling match with a Muslim wrestler called Mohdin Tamboli, did he start to wear the typical *Sufi* mode of dress of long shirt or *kafni*.[10] In accordance with his strict adherence to poverty, his *kafnis* were often torn and showed evidence of being repeatedly mended. This fact is reflected in a few extant photographs and reproduced by artists in subsequent paintings. He showed great resistance to wearing new clothes donated by devotees, preferring to mend his old ones. This accords with *Sufi* tradition, where the patched frock became one of the symbols for Sufism itself. The cloth he wore around his head was usually white, covering his forehead and tied in a large knot at the back in the typical manner of a *Sufi*.

Hindu biographers argue that Sai Baba's ears were pierced, known in the local idiom as 'bored', as for example the statement

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of one Raghuvir Purandhare, who interpreted the holes in his ears as confirmation of his Brahmin caste status.[11] But Das Ganu, an ardent Hindu himself, in his *Sri Sainath Staven Manjari*, verse 67, categorically states that Sai Baba's ears were not pierced.[12] The significance of this lies in the fact that many Hindus at this time would have had their ears pierced at birth. In the same poem he says that his own preference would be that Sai Baba were Hindu, but that he was a Muslim. Ardent Hindu authors go to great lengths to refute this line with footnote references to 'prove' this was not true. The debate continues and remains unresolved. Similarly, there is diverse opinion as to whether the saint was circumcised, which, if he was, would confirm his Muslim identity. Dabholkar informs us that two years before Sai Baba passed away, on Seemollanghan night (Dussehra), he flew into a wild rage, tore off his clothes and stood there stark naked. He shouted "Now decide, decide for yourselves whether I am a Muslim or a Hindu".[13] Unfortunately, in the ensuing confusion, the vital conclusion was never recorded. However, we may infer that Sai Baba was almost certainly circumcised, because if not, the fact would have been duly reported by his Hindu biographers.

According to the *1884 Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency: Ahmadnagar District*, it is stated that all Muslims of the Ahmednagar district wear a beard, a *kudta* or Muslim shirt which reaches to the knees, eat beef and mutton, and smoke tobacco through a '*hukka*' or water-pipe (today spelt *hookah*). Sai Baba wore a full beard trimmed short over the top lip. In later years, his pictures always show him with a white beard. Photographs of Sai Baba show him wearing a *kurta* or *kafni* with an undergarment called a *langot* for most of his adult life. He ate whatever was given to him when he begged for alms, but it is recorded that he ate meat and on occasion would cook mutton or fowl, but never beef, for the *faqirs*. There are a number of references showing clearly that he had no objection to eating meat, and partook of fish and meat in the company of *faqirs*. Imambai Chota Khan records that Sai Baba would often prepare meals of *khichdi* and mutton for his Muslim devotees, but he would prepare vegetarian meals for

Hindu devotees.[14] When Sai Baba knew he was dying, in accordance with *Sufi* custom, he sent money for *poli* and chicken curry to be purchased to feed the poor.[15] On one occasion Sai Baba cooked huge quantities of vegetarian food for a *bhandara* (typical *Sufi* feast), but a *faqir* wanting a meat dish added some meat. A Hindu vegetarian disgusted with this behaviour asked Sai Baba, 'Why all this *himsa*?' (violence to animals). Sai Baba replied: 'He that slays saves; and he that saves slays', implying that God is the creator and destroyer and it is all His will.[16] However, if Sai Baba had been a Hindu *sadhu* there is no possibility that he would have given non-vegetarian food to others. *Sufis* generally ate meat, concentrating their food restriction to fasts or eating sparingly. There is an early picture of Sai Baba smoking a water-pipe *hookah* when he was young, but there is no reference anywhere to one being used in his later life. Dabholkar records that this was a Muslim practice where an inner circle of friends would share a *chilim* or *hookah*, passing it around until the tobacco was exhausted.[17] Once Sri Sathya Sai Baba, in referring to his own habit of chewing *pan*, made reference in one of his discourses to his previous habit of smoking a *hookah* in his Shirdi incarnation. In later life Shirdi Sai Baba smoked a large clay pipe with tobacco called in Marathi, a *chilim*. As already indicated, Sai Baba shared a *chilim* with the Muslim Chand Patil at their first meeting. Although generally *Sufis* and *faqirs* are known to have smoked hemp or *bhang*, there is no hint anywhere in the literature that Sai Baba ever smoked or consumed these narcotics.

Like the early *Sufis*, Sai Baba never wrote anything, preferring to teach devotion to God by parable, anecdote and demonstration. Sai Baba's own ascetic practices, and the teachings that he imparted to his disciples and devotees closely mirror those detailed in the *Sufi tariqat*. The *tariqat* is comprised primarily of seven stations or stages called the *maqamat*, which involves effort on the part of the aspirant, and then highlights divine states known as *ahwal*, which are glimpses of awareness which come unbidden and are said to be bestowed by God. These states are said to descend upon an aspirant as he moves through the different way-stations of the *tariqat*. Chapter Nine in Part II is devoted to drawing a correspondence between Sai Baba's life and teaching and the *Sufi maqamat* and *ahwal*. Sai Baba particularly emphasized the importance of the last three stations of the *maqamat*: patience (*sabr*), faith and trust in God (*tawakkul*), and the acceptance of everything as God's Will (*rida*). According to his biographers, he spoke constantly of *saburi,* a word derived from the Islamic *sabr*, and *nista* or its Islamic equivalent *tawakkul*. While the Marathi term *nista* can denote trust in any context, as can the Sanskrit word *sraddha* (faith) for which it is sometimes substituted in translation, Sai Baba used it to mean *brahma-nista*, specifically trust in God or utter faith in God. The Arabic word *iman* also denotes faith, and it is recorded that on one occasion a Muslim came requesting *iman* from Sai Baba to secure a good end.[18] Similarly the Marathi word *saburi*, derived from the Arabic *sabr,* specifically means in this context the patient reliance on God to know the right time for any action.

Sai Baba, according to all accounts, was a mystic who practised special esoteric techniques which led to his ultimate realization of God. To the lay observer he was a strange individual in Muslim garb whose behaviour was bizarre, and speech incomprehensible. His language was highly cryptic, full of symbolism, parable, allegory and metaphor which was often taken for meaningless ranting.[19] Often the significance of his mystic statements only dawned upon his devotees or visitors much later. For instance, one morning Sai Baba told those around him to bring *geru* to dye his robe orange. It was clear that the saint did not literally want to dye his *kafni*, so the devotees could only shrug their shoulders. Later in the day, Mule Shastri, a staunch Hindu devotee of Guru Dholap, arrived in Shirdi but was very reticent to prostrate before a Muslim saint. On approaching the *masjid* however, Shastri saw a vision of his deceased *Guru* sitting in Sai Baba's seat and rushed to bow before him. Sai Baba had thus mystically donned the orange robe of the *Guru,* thereby removing any anti-Muslim prejudice, and at the same time teaching tolerance to his devotees.

One of the devotees stated that Sai Baba would tell 'thousands of *goshtis*' or bizarre little stories with which he would illustrate his point.[20] On one level they were just entertaining folk stories, but for the person to whom they were directed they conveyed specific messages. This is a very typical method of *Sufi* teaching. Idries Shah has made a collection of such short *Sufi* stories which taught morality by example, and which were then still current in the Middle East. Many of these stories centre around the life of a fictitious Mulla called Nasruddin. Shah has published a number of collections of these *Sufi* teaching stories.[21] Here is an example from *The Exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasrudin*:

> Someone saw Nasrudin searching for something on the ground. "What have you lost, Mulla?" he asked. "My key", said the Mulla. So they both went down on their hands and knees and looked for it. After some time the other man asked: "Where exactly did you drop it?"
> "In my own house."
> "Then why are you looking here?"
> "There is more light here than inside my own house".[22]

Through the ridiculousness, naivete and humour of these stories centred on the hapless Mulla, many spiritual as well as down-to-earth lessons were taught. In the above tale, devotees are being taught that it is as absurd to look for spiritual truth externally, when it is to be found in one's own heart, as to look outside in the street for a key that was dropped in the house. Many of Sai Baba's *goshtis* or stories were in the same vein. Sai Bāba told this *goshti* one day when a devotee came to him complaining that he had no peace of mind:

> Once a merchant came here. In his presence, a quadruped passed its stomata [stool]. The merchant anxious to attain his quest spread his cloth beneath its tail, gathered all the nine balls and took them away. He got concentration and peace of mind.[23]

On one level it is a harmless if somewhat ridiculous story, but its inner spiritual meaning for the devotee was that God's grace was the wish-fulfilling cow. The nine balls excreted are the traditional nine forms of devotion or the *nava vidha bhakti*, which when collected and practised bring peace of mind. On one occasion, Das Ganu wanted to write a commentary on the Vedantic work *Amritanubhava*. A Vedanta scholar offered to help but, when Das Ganu said he would rely on Sai Baba, the scholar jeered saying that Sai Baba was a Moslem and knew nothing. Nevertheless, Das Ganu went to Sai Baba who blessed the project by placing his hands on his head. Das Ganu records that all the numerous *goshtis* he had heard from Sai Baba furnished him with unique similes and fresh anecdotes for his commentary, thus avoiding time-worn cliches.[24]

Sai Baba did not formally align himself with any established *Sufi* orders, although he had a number of features in common with the Chishtiyya order.[25] Audition, or the use of music to induce trance, mystical experience or absorption in God, was known as *sama* by the Chishtis, and was encouraged by them, though discouraged by other *Sufi* Orders. Sai Baba, it is recorded, used to sing Persian and Urdu songs and dance in the village *takya* or Muslim rest house in his younger days in Shirdi. Later in his life, he encouraged musical sessions and the singing of devotional songs, *qawwalis, bhajans* and *kirtans* in his presence. Das Ganu told Narasimhaswami, 'Baba occasionally sang Musalmani songs that I could not understand.'[26] In 1913 Sai Baba showed his familiarity with Chishti masters, such as Habi Balishah Chishti Nizami, through a discussion with the latter's follower, Abdul Rahim Rangari. This master was well-known for his love of music, and was accompanied by musicians whenever he travelled. In this conversation Sai Baba indicates that on the previous night he was very moved by the devotional music.

> The night previous to his coming there was plenty of music and Baba said that he wept all night. 'They abused me', Baba said. Rangari understood that by abuse Baba meant that he was completely absorbed. Rangari then said, 'One who loves God would weep, laugh, or dance as the songs in praise of God go on.' Baba said 'Just so. You

> are right. Have you your own *Guru*?' Rangari said, 'Yes, Habi Balishah Chishti Nizami.' Baba said, 'That is why you understand'...music is used as a help to trance.[27]

Sai Baba was often regarded not merely as an unorthodox Muslim, but a heterodox one. Das Ganu averred that Sai Baba sometimes came into conflict with local Muslims 'as very often his acts and ideas did not agree with their orthodoxy'.[28] Some Muslims wanted Sai Baba to go to the city to perform Friday prayers, the *khutba* and *namaz*, and take part in the Moharram festival. At first he appeared to go along with the idea, but in the end refused to go. For Moharram some *Shi'i* Muslims asked Sai Baba if they could instal a traditional *tabut* or symbolic tomb in the *masjid*, and he gave his permission, but after a few days he had it removed. Das Ganu records that the Muslims 'dared not do anything against this powerful Baba.'[29] Sai Baba even refused permission for a *sehra* or an ornamental flower arrangement to be put in the *minbar* or special niche facing Mecca in his *masjid*.[30] Sometimes Sai Baba would go out of his way to reform or re-educate Hindus about Islam. On one occasion a party from the Ramadasi *panth* came to visit Sai Baba, because they heard he was liberal with money. The wife was a sincere devotee of Rama and Sita, but the husband was avaricious, and inwardly thought that Sai Baba, being Muslim, was corrupting the Hindus. Sai Baba made the man realize that in his own house the Muslim symbols such as the *panja* and the *tabut* at Moharram were prayed to, and that the Muslim folk-deity Kadbibi was worshipped at their weddings and special festivals. After transforming his perception of Islam, Sai Baba granted him a vision, and it is recorded that the couple returned home in a state of bliss.[31]

Heterodox *Sufis* are characterized by their often bizarre utterances and anti-social behaviour such as raging anger, which is sometimes accompanied by the throwing of stones. Sai Baba was well-known for his violent outbursts and blazing temper, his eyes becoming red and fierce, all apparently without cause, but he soon calmed down to his normal self. He was even known to throw stones at people coming towards him on occasion, but a good reason would often emerge later. He seemed to know the inner thoughts of visitors and their various reasons for coming to him and was also aware of any disparaging remarks made before they were in his earshot. When challenged, it transpired that Sai Baba was correct. Due to his strange behaviour, Sai Baba was often classed as a mad *faqir* or *veda faqir*, before he was more generally understood.[32] Obscure pronouncements and bizarre acts of a mystic are often inexplicable from the mundane viewpoint. For example, one day when cholera was rampant, Sai Baba suddenly began to grind bags of wheat into flour. Village women, seeing this, insisted on taking over the grinding, and later figuring he would have no use for such quantities, started to carry it away. Sai Baba became extremely angry, but when he cooled off, ordered that the flour be scattered on the ground circling the perimeter of the village. According to his biographers, only later did it become apparent that the scattered flour had mystically protected the village of Shirdi from the virulent cholera raging in the region. No further cases of cholera were reported in Shirdi thereafter.[33] Respect for Sai Baba's powers grew from this time.

Due to Sai Baba's strange behaviour, Shepherd in his book *Gurus Rediscovered*, has suggested that Sai Baba could have been a *majzub,* which is the Islamic term for one 'attracted to God'. The term also refers to one who through no effort of his own is overcome with a mystical experience as a gift of Grace, but fails to return to normal worldly consciousness.[34] Meher Baba worked extensively with such people whom he called the God-intoxicated, known in Persion as *masts*.[35] However there is no evidence to support the idea that Sai Baba was a *majzub*, for Sai Baba assiduously followed the strict Sufi path. Accounts of Sai Baba leaving his body at will, known as *sveccha marana*, in 1886, also relate that he came back to normal behaviour afterwards. Mrs. Manager, an avid devotee of Sai Baba, when interviewed by Narasimhaswami in May 1936, suggested that the opposite was nearer the truth- that he never lost consciousness:

> With Sai Baba, there was this peculiar feature. He had not to go into trance to achieve anything, or to reach any

> higher position or knowledge. He was every moment exercising a double consciousness, one actively utilizing the Ego called Sri Sai Baba and dealing with other Egos in temporal or spiritual affairs, and the other -entirely superseding all Egos and resting in the position of the Universal Soul or Ego; he was exercising and manifesting all the powers and features incidental to both the states of consciousness.[36]

Meher Baba worked extensively with God-intoxicated individuals but never suggested that Sai Baba should be classed with either *majzubs* or *masts*. William Donkin, who wrote a seminal work on Meher Baba's work with *masts*, classified many different types of spiritual intoxication or uncontrolled mystical experience. However Sai Baba's name was never classed with any of these and Meher Baba unfailingly recognised Sai Baba's high spirituality, always referring to him with the title Hazrat, a *Sufi* honorific reserved for Perfected Masters. This Parsi holy man was also known by the same epithet - Hazrat Meher Baba - and many of his own devotees who wrote books about him, also used the same honorific in referring to Hazrat Sai Baba.[37]

Meher Baba's close disciple, the Englishman C.B. Purdom, writing in 1937, insisted that 'Sai Baba was 'Mahommedan' even though thousands of his devotees were Hindu'.[38] Shepherd suggests that Purdom must have been 'tuned into' the oral stream of information current in the Deccan in the years immediately following Sai Baba's demise.[39] Meher Baba and his disciple Purdom were in fact in an excellent position to listen to the then current stories of Sai Baba, as their *ashram* was in Ahmednagar, the largest town close to Shirdi. Meher Baba's *guru*, Upasani Maharaj, who was himself a close disciple of Sai Baba, had an ashram only a few miles from Shirdi at Sakori, and out of respect for his Muslim *guru* had a small mosque built near his ashram.

One of the Parsi residents of Meher Baba's ashram was Gustadji Hansotia who had had first-hand experience of Sai Baba from the year 1910 until the saint's demise in 1918. Arriving from Gujarat, Hansotia went to live in Shirdi and from then on was under instructions from Sai Baba to follow a renunciate path. There were just a few individuals who were thus guided, for in general Sai Baba advocated not renunciation but the householder lifestyle for devotees. Hansotia was the only one in Meher Baba's circle who had close contact with Sai Baba over such a long period of time. After 1927 he undertook a vow of silence, with the unfortunate result for us, that he left no record of his opinion or experiences of Sai Baba.[40] Nevertheless, as Meher Baba had no doubt discussed Sai Baba earlier with Hansotia, he must have felt it to be most appropriate to use the Muslim title of *Hazra*t when referring to Sai Baba.

Before the crowds from Bombay began to arrive in 1910, it is apparent that over many prior decades Sai Baba administered to a large *Sufi* community of itinerant *faqirs*, who would visit him periodically for spiritual guidance and for whom he was their *pir*. Similarly, Shama told Narasimhaswami that 'many Rohillas came here in Baba's time.'[41] A clue confirming this is to be found in the *Saibaba MS* p.15-16 [K123-122]. There it gives a two-page Arabic *durud* from the *Qur'an*, written in a different hand-writing from Abdul's, and signed 'Pirzadah Syed Noor - Syed Amin Khandhar, presently a scribe in an Urdu school in Shirdi.' From no other source do we have mention of the existence of an Urdu school in Shirdi. No Hindu would be interested in learning Urdu, or having their children taught in the Urdu medium, so it must have been for the children of Muslims or itinerant *Sufi*s. Abdulla, a Pathan Muslim *faqir* from Tarbella, told Narasimhaswami plainly that Sai Baba had a reputation for caring for itinerant *faqirs*, and related his own experience which occurred in 1913. He wanted to go on a pilgrimage or *hajj* to Mecca and had heard that Sai Baba showered money on *faqirs*. So he went to Shirdi hoping to receive some funds and reported that Sai Baba 'fed me and other *faqirs* abundantly', and almost immediately he lost the desire to go to Mecca.[42] Sai Baba, his biographers confirm, gave substantial amounts of money over the years to a *faqir* known as Bade Baba, also known as Pir Mohammad, who came to live in Shirdi and enjoyed great attention from Sai Baba. There are two stories involving Muslims which illustrate Sai Baba's interaction with visiting *Sufis*. The first involves a Rohilla[43] who after arriving in Shirdi annoyed almost everyone with his loud recitation of verses from the *Qur'an* and repetition of the *kalimat Allah*: he would also shout *Allahu Akbar* loudly and often through the night. The villagers begged Sai Baba to stop this performance but he refused saying: "It does not matter if he shouts, Baba [referring to himself] is fond of the *kalima*, there is no comparison between the powerful words of the *kalima* and the empty complaints of the villagers."[44] Taking the side of the Rohilla, Sai Baba evidently had no objection to Muslim prayer calls, even at the cost of a little 'Hindu' annoyance. Evidently,

> Sai Baba took the villagers to task, and asked them to mind their own business, and not the Rohilla. He said to them that the Rohilla had got a very bad wife, a Zantippi, who tried to come in and trouble the Rohilla and Himself; but hearing the Rohilla's prayers, she dare not enter and they were at peace and happy.[45]

Here is another example of Sai Baba's little *goshtis*, for he goes on to say, ' In fact, the Rohilla had no wife and by his wife Baba meant *durbuddhi*, i.e. bad thoughts.' The passage concludes that Baba liked prayers and cries to God better than anything else. Dabholkar later comments that Baba had love for everyone and liked the company of the Rohilla, and did not differentiate between Brahmin and Muslim Pathan. They were the same to him.[46]

In a second incident which must have occurred in or around 1890, a *faqir* from Ahmadnagar, called Javahar Ali, came to Rahata, a village close to Shirdi, with his *murids* or disciples. He prided himself on being able to recite the *Qur'an* in full, and he was puffed up with ego to the extent that he began to call Sai Baba his *murid* also. In all humility Sai Baba went along with the play, and stayed some time in Rahata with him. When the Shirdi residents pleaded with Sai Baba to return, Javahar Ali came with him and stayed in Shirdi until he was defeated in a debate by Devidas, a young saintly Hindu. Thus, Javahar Ali was chased away, only to return many years later to prostrate at the feet of Sai Baba.[47] Both these incidents provide further evidence of Sai Baba's general acceptance as a Muslim *Sufi* and his pre-turn-of-the-century interaction with *faqirs*.

The life of Sai Baba fits a pattern of Muslim *Sufi pirs* that was well developed in Bengal. Bengal is an area which in previous centuries was subject to vigorous *Sufi* missionary activity, effectively employing peaceful persuasion to convert Hindus to Islam. A folk-ballad from Bengal illustrates the function of a *pir* as a healer, helper of the needy and miracle-worker.

> A *pir* along with five disciples appears on the village pasture-ground. The *pir* clears up the place underneath a banyan tree, builds a shrine (*darga)*, and lives there. He attains a wide renown and possesses immense power (*karamat)*. He cures all sickness by applying dust, does not let anybody tell his secret, for he himself [anticipates and] tells everything in detail, makes sweets (*mewa*) of clay, uttering charms (*mantra*), and distributes among children. All are struck by his miracles (*karamat*) and people come in hundreds to have a glimpse of him (*darsan manase*). Everyone's desires get fulfilled, and his name spreads far and near. Rice, banana, and *sinna* (*shirni*) continue pouring in, and there is no end to the [gifts of] fowl, goat, and pigeon. But the *pir* does not take himself even a particle of the gifts and distributes all among the poor and famished.[48]

Roy comments that this folk-ballad is unique in offering us an insight into the *modus operandi* of a *pir* in a rural setting and also into the folk perception of his religious and social roles.[49] While this ballad originated in Bengal, its message equally applies to Maharashtra, except that Shirdi was predominantly a Hindu area. If Sai Baba had lived in Bengal it is certain that he would have been hailed as a *Sufi pir*. His practices and manner of living were exactly as described in the above quotation; he lived for many years under a tree, demonstrated miraculous powers, cured disease using *udi* or ash, people came great distances for his *darshan*, and, although devotees donated quantities of money and food gifts, Sai Baba made sure everything was re-distributed by the end of the day. The Marathi literature does not refer to Sai Baba as a *pir* or *murshid*, preferring, in the prevailing Hindu atmosphere of Shirdi in his last few years, the titles *guru*, *samartha sadguru* or *maharaj*. It is noteworthy that these same Hindu terms were also used by Shekh Mahammad and Shah Muni in Maharashtra to refer to *Sufi* saints. Further information about these *Sufi* poet-saints is given in chapter six. Sai Baba however, always referred to his own *guru* by the Arabic term of *murshid*.

A cult of *pirs* developed in Bengal and their centres were the *dargahs* of previous charismatic *pirs*, and hospices or meeting halls, known as *khanqahs*. The *Sufi* saint, through his practices, acquired spiritual *baraka* with which he could heal the sick, clairvoyantly see things in the distance, be in two places at once and perform all kinds of miraculous deeds. This power is said to remain after the death of the *Sufi* saint for, according to *Sufi* tradition, saints do not die - they still exist in a subtle form. Thus, being in the company of a saint at his *dargah* is said to be superior to reciting hundreds of prayers. Herein lies the origin of saint worship at the *dargahs* of *Sufi* saints, which are visited regularly by the faithful on Thursdays and annually on the death anniversary of the saint, known as the *urs*. There are numerous *dargahs* in Maharashtra, mostly dating back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and they range from simple mounds exposed to the elements to elaborate domed structures which are objects of pilgrimage. In Aurangabad, there are the elaborate *dargahs* of Nizamuddin Aurangabadi and Ahmed Gujarati Shuttari, both of which still operate as centres attracting devotees every Thursday, and each holding an annual *urs* festival.

More recent *dargahs* in Aurangabad are those of Bannemiya and Hazrat Shamsuddin, who were contemporaries of Sai Baba, and although there is little information available, we can infer that in their life-times they were well-known to Sai Baba. According to the *pirzada* or keeper of the *dargah*, Haja Saheb, Bannemiya's grandson, as a young man Bannemiya was a sergeant or *hawaldar* in the British army and resigned after he met his *Sufi* master, Afzal Shah Biyabani in Warangal, and became his *murid*. After his master died in 1856 Bannemiya came to Aurangabad where he 'sat under a tree' and eventually became a highly regarded *Sufi faqir*.[50] He was visited by Meher Baba in 1915, who was on tour visiting spiritual people, and is described by him as a *majzub*, a God-realized *Sufi* who remains unconscious of the gross world.[51] He is reputed to have sat naked in all seasons, and practised the austerity of standing with one arm raised and one arm down.[52] Bannemiya must have been 22 years older than Sai Baba, as he is known to have been 105 when he died in 1921. In 1932 the tomb of Bannemiya in Aurangabad was honoured by his family with the construction of a large *dargah* which still attracts quite a few people on Thursdays and thousands at the annual *urs* festival. The *baraka* of Bannemiya is widely known to help those with mental problems (*see* Plate 17, a photograph of Bannemiya, given to the author by his grandson, Haja Saheb, the current *pirzada* of the Bannemiya *dargah*).

One contact which has been recorded took place between Sai Baba and Bannemiya in 1918 a few weeks before Sai Baba passed away. According to *Sufi* practice, certain preparations have to be made prior to death. Knowing his death was imminent, having been forewarned by a bright ball of light entering the *masjid* one night,[53] Sai Baba sent a garland of sevanthi flowers to Bannemiya with Kasim, the son of Bade Baba, with the message that: 'On the ninth day of the ninth month, *Allah* would take away the life [literally his fire]. Such is *Allah*'s wish'.[54] Bannemiya is said to have raised his eyes to the sky and tears rolled down his face, as he understood the implication of the message that Sai Baba's demise was imminent. His emotional reaction implies that he knew and loved Sai Baba from an earlier period in their lives. On my visit to the Bannemiya *dargah* in 1990, I spoke to Haja Saheb, who is the grandson of Bannemiya, who said that Sai Baba was a disciple of Bannemiya, and apparently asked him for *nazahojaye* (mystical insight) meaning *saksatkara* (a vision or transformation of consciousness) or to give him the experience of God-realization.

It is known that Bannemiya came to Aurangabad in 1856, after his *Sufi pir* passed away and we also know that Sai Baba was in or around Auraṇgabad at this time. Only in 1858 did he go back to Shirdi and live alone under the *neem* tree for some years.

In the same way Sai Baba probably knew Hazrat Shamsuddin who was also in Aurangabad when they were both young men. Sai Baba sent Kasim and Imambhai Chota Khan from Shirdi to deliver a certain message to Shamsuddin, who also seemed to have clairvoyant powers for Imambhai told Narasimhaswami:

> When we were at the station, the *faqir* Shamsuddin (whom I knew already) came there and said: 'Who are the guests who have came from *Faqir* Sai?'. Shamsuddin himself repeated Baba's direction to us word for word and took us to his house in the fort and fed us.[55]

Kasim was to give Shamsuddin Rs 250 and request him to pay for special refrains known as *moulu* to be sung about the Prophet Muhammed, and devotional songs called *qawwalis*, and he was to give him the unleavened bread called *poli* and chicken which Sai Baba had prepared in order to feed the poor as charity or *nyas*. There is very little information about the *faqir* Shamsuddin except that his *dargah* is in the same locale as that of Hazrat Shah Noor Miyan in Aurangabad. According to local history, the Nizam of Hyderabad sent Shamsuddin to care for Shah Noor in Aurangabad when he was ill, and after the latter's death, the *faqir* stayed on. To sing *qawwalis* and feed the poor are typical *Sufi* requests at the time of death, but these are the sort of requests one might ask of long-standing friends rather than of total strangers.

A *Sufi* master's *baraka* is said to be enshrined in his *dargah*, and there is a *Sufi* maxim which says that 'friends of God do not die, their influence and power remains after physical death.'[56] It is no coincidence therefore, that out of the eleven well-known 'promises' of Sai Baba[57], four refer to his assurance that he would be overseeing the needs of his devotees from the tomb. To a devotee who feared the saint's presence and help would disappear when he died, Sai Baba said in Marathi, literally translated: "From within the tomb I will beat with sticks", meaning that his work would not cease with the death of the body.[58] This is a typical *Sufi* phenomenon. Normally a *Sufi* belonging to an established *Sufi* Order would symbolically hand over his *baraka* to his successor in a chain of succession known as a *silsila,* through the gift of a piece of clothing or small personal item. The piece of cloth that Sai Baba wrapped around his head and a brick which he kept with him, were said to be gifts from his own *guru*, symbolizing the transfer of power. However, Sai Baba neither belonged to a *Sufi* Order nor did he name a successor, making it clear that he himself would still be available to help and guide all those who sought refuge in him, even after his death. Dhumal in his interview with Narasimhaswami, declared:

> Where is Baba gone? He is still alive and active - more active, if that were possible, than he was before his *mahasamadhi*. Anyone in downright earnest can get in touch with him, today and at once.[59]

Bharadwaja informs us that he experimented with this notion that Sai Baba was still present to help his devotees, when he went to Shirdi in 1975 with an urgent personal question, to which he incredibly received a direct answer. Although Bharadwaja's own inclination was to remain celibate, his burning question to Sai Baba was whether he should marry or not. After performing circumambulation or *pradaksina* around the Samadhi Mandir of Sai Baba innumerable times and praying earnestly to Sai Baba to resolve his problem, he was drawn to sit on a park seat, and was immediately approached by a man who informed him that he had had a vision of Sai Baba in his morning meditation and was told to give a message to Bharadwaja. The details of how he was to recognize him are all given in his book, but the essential message from Sai Baba was that he was indeed to marry.[60] Hundreds of similar testimonials could be cited from recent books and the *Shri Sai Leela* journal.

At the mystic level there is a mergence of ideals and experiences of God-realisation in both the *Sufi* and Hindu *bhakti* saints. Many of Sai Baba's visitors and devotees had little or no experience of meeting a *Sufi* mystic, but many had seen or heard of Akkalkot Maharaj, Narayan Maharaj and other contemporary Maharashtrian Hindu saints and would also be familiar with the lives and songs of the medieval poet-saints such as Eknath, Namdev and Tukaram. It was natural therefore for them to see Sai Baba and interpret his actions from this viewpoint. Sai Baba, as stated earlier, sang devotional songs in Persian and Urdu, and conversed with Abdul in Urdu as evidenced by the *Saibaba MS*, but, according to early devotees and the local school-master, he adopted Marathi to suit the understanding of the majority of his devotees. He soon accommodated his Bombay Presidency devotees by submitting to local customs and allowing local festivals to be held, to the point where visitors who arrived in his later years became confused thinking that maybe he was a Hindu dressed as a Muslim. Today, in defence of Sai Baba's Hindu status, Hindu devotees often cite the fact that Sai Baba celebrated the Hindu festival *Ramnavami*. However, opinion changes when the full story is revealed. In 1897 a local Hindu called Gopalrao Gund, who was a regular visitor to Shirdi, wanted to honour Sai Baba with a special festival and suggested an '*urus*' fair to be held in Shirdi. *Urs* is a Persian term for a traditional annual Muslim celebration of a *Sufi* saint's death at his *dargah*, and this is known in Maharashtra as an *urus*.[61] An *Urs* is more literally a wedding with God, which is a euphemism for the reuniting of the soul with God at death. It is therefore an occasion for a grand celebration and the saint's *baraka* or spiritual power is said to be at its most powerful at this time. In describing how the occasion came to pass, the footnote comment by Gunaji is especially significant, for it states: '*urs* celebrations are made at the tombs of Muslim holy men. It is surprising how Mr Gund, a Hindu, got this idea.'[62] At this early date, it is thus evident that no one questioned the fact that Sai Baba was Muslim, being dressed as a Muslim, living in a *masjid* and behaving as a *Sufi* mystic. Therefore, in order to honour Sai Baba, the occasion perforce had to be celebrated as a Muslim festival.

The *urs* in Shirdi was unusual in that it originated while Sai Baba was still alive, but it reflects the desire of his devotees to honour the saint publicly, and the appropriate way was throug holding a Festival. Many people were drawn to to the Festival because of Sai Baba's growing reputation as a miracle-worker. Many came specifically for some physical healing, a demonstration of his divine power, or to experience *saksatkara*, literally 'making before the eye', a divine insight, a vision or a transformation of consciousness. A Muslim devotee, Amir Dalal, suggested that a 'sandal procession', which is held to honour great Muslim saints, should also be inaugurated to honour Sai Baba, as part of the fair. Readings from the *Qur'an* were to be followed by a traditional Muslim procession of devotees carrying flat dishes called *thalis* containing sandalwood paste known as *chandan* and burning incense, winding around the village to the musical accompaniment of a band, following which the contents of the dishes were plastered by hand over the niche in the *masjid*. Thus a 'sandal procession' formed an integral part of the *urs* fair for many years.[63] The Hindus donated two embroidered flags and they carried these in procession and fixed them to the corners of the *masjid*. The fair included wrestling matches, and feeding the poor on a grand scale. It is very clear from the description, that the original fair was a specifically Muslim occasion, initiated by his devotees including Hindus, in order to honour their Muslim master.

The Sai Baba *urs* fair was a great success for a period of fifteen years until 1912, when a Hindu devotee, realizing that the *urs* fair was held close to *Ramnavami*, the Hindu festival honouring the birth of Lord Rama, normally held on a movable date according to the moon, suggested that both events could be celebrated together. The date for the *urs* had originally been fixed in consultation with Sai Baba, only being harmonized much later with *Ramnavami*, although his biographers speculate that Sai Baba intended all along that the two celebrations should be united. Thus, through Hindu enthusiasm, *Ramnavami* celebrations came to be incorporated into the annual *urs* fair, and eventually came to dominate it.

In some cases the principles of Sufism and Hindu monism - the principle which recognizes that there is only one ultimate

Being or force in the universe - overlap and it is left to the individual to interpret. A doctor who was an ardent devotee of Ram, came to Shirdi to meet Sai Baba. Initially he thought, 'Sai Baba is a Muslim. I do not feel like saluting the feet of a Muslim'.[64] However, looking in the direction of the saint, instead of Sai Baba seated in the *masjid* he saw the god Ram himself, and he instantly ran to pay obeisance. The precept of unity of being or *tauhid*, a crucial tenet of both Sufism and monism, is illustrated here by Sai Baba. On the other hand, Narasimhaswami records an exchange between a Muslim devotee, Abdul Rahim Rangari, and the saint. Finding Sai Baba in his *masjid* being smeared with sandalwood paste as part of a Hindu *puja*, the horrified Muslim blurted out that this was against Islamic custom. Sai Baba, as if shrugging his shoulders replied "*taisa desa, taisa yesa*", which is equivalent to the English expression, 'As in Rome do as the Romans do', or, when surrounded by a majority of Hindus who want to honour you in their own manner as their *guru*-God, one has to go along with it, to make them happy.[65]

In referring to his own spiritual status, Sai Baba demonstrated two distinct attitudes. On some occasions he would be totally egoless and deny any special power. In this dualistic mode he would ask: "What am I? a petty *faqir*! I am not God",[66] or "What have I got? I'm just a naked *faqir* with human organs, like anyone else."[67] On other occasions when in a mode of complete identification with God, he would come out with statements like: "I am *parvardigar*. I live at Shirdi and everywhere ...the universe is in me."[68] *Parvardigar* is a Persian word referring to God in his role as Almighty Sustainer. In this universalistic mode, which became more frequent towards the end of his life, Sai Baba is very reminiscent of the medieval *Sufi* saints such as Abu Yazid Bayazid and Mansur al-Hallaj. These two enigmatic *Sufis* have been alternately vilified and revered through the centuries for uttering theopathic locutions known as *shathiyat* or mystic utterances in a state of ecstasy. In their devotion to *Allah* they transcended all divisions of the individual self and Divinity, merging like the wave with the ocean. Abu Yazud exclaimed, '*Subhani*' meaning 'Glory be to me' or 'Praise be to me. How great is my majesty.' Mansur al-Hallaj, in an ecstatic state exclaimed, '*Ana'l haqq*' - 'I am Creative Truth or I am God'. To the enlightened *Sufi*, these men attained union with God, but others misunderstood them as blasphemous. Rumi, commenting on these *shathiyat,* said:

> Take the famous utterance 'I am God'. Some men reckon it as a great pretension. But 'I am God' is in fact a great humility... He has naughted himself and cast himself to the winds. He says 'I am God' that is 'I am not', He is all, nothing has existence but God, I am pure non-entity, I am nothing.[69]

There are numerous recorded occasions, where Sai Baba similarly identifies himself with *Allah* in an ecstatic state. Narasimhaswami records that Sai Baba on occasion said "*Ana'l Haqq*" in Arabic,[70] and "*mai Allahu*" - 'I am God' in Hindustani.[71]

That Sai Baba was generally classed as a Muslim saint is clearly illustrated in two instances. The first, not found in Gunaji's *Sri Sai Satcharita*, is that a Muslim called Amir went to see Sai Baba and saluted him by ritually kissing his hand. This is a Muslim greeting, and Muslims never touch the feet, as do Hindus. The episode of *padukas*, related earlier, was allowed by Sai Baba purely out of consideration for accepted Hindu ritual and customs. Secondly, there is a story about a picture of Sai Baba that was delivered to Dabholkar.[72] In the recorded incident we are told that a devout Muslim, one Ali Mahomed, decided to hang up some pictures of local Muslim saints in his house at Bandra, including those of Baba Abdul Rahiman[73], Moulanasaheb Mohamed Hussain, Baba Tajuddin and Sai Baba of Shirdi. The famous Baba Abdul Rahiman came to hear of this and was enraged at the apparent image-worship the pictures represented (anthropomorphic figures of God being forbidden in Islam) and ordered all the pictures, including his own, to be thrown into the sea. How the small oval picture of Sai Baba came to be rescued and subsequently delivered to Dabholkar is not relevant here.

What is significant, however, is that obviously Ali Mahomed had no doubt in his mind that Sai Baba was a Muslim saint.

Did Sai Baba die as a Muslim? Narasimhaswami comments that 'the almost universal belief of people (Hindus and Muslims alike), when Baba passed away, was that Sai Baba, living in the *masjid*, was a Muslim'- albeit an unorthodox one. So the Muslims gathered around the body in order to take charge of it.[74] Imambhai Chota Khan, a Muslim devotee of Sai Baba, tells an incredible story of events that occurred four months before Sai Baba died, an account which is not often found in the secondary literature. He recalled that one evening in 1918 Sai Baba asked for four chickens to be brought, as guests were to come. Around 2 am, hiding behind a curtain with Appa Bhil, Imambhai witnessed a ball of fire, twelve inches in diameter which streamed into the *masjid* and rested at the niche or *minbar* for a while, after which it split into innumerable fragments brilliantly lighting up the whole place. The light disappeared as Sai Baba went to the *dhuni* and, resting his stick on his neck, spent the next 15 minutes reciting something in Arabic.[75] The next morning Sai Baba sent the two young Muslims to visit the *faqirs* in Aurangabad to announce his imminent passing away, the story of which was cited earlier. Imambhai, being Muslim himself, was knowledgeable enough to affirm quite emphatically that Sai Baba was speaking Arabic, and later in his interview with Narasimhaswami repeats emphatically 'Baba knew Arabic'.[76] The *Qur'an* is written in Arabic and is often memorised as a sacred book without the individual knowing the meaning. At this stage we have no way of knowing if Sai Baba was quoting Arabic verses from the *Qur'an* from memory or whether he genuinely spoke fluent Arabic. He would often recite the first chapter of the *Qur'an* when in the company of Muslims and expound *suras* of the *Qur'an* to his Muslim servitor, Abdul. He was heard to speak many languages including Arabic, Persian and Urdu, and in his early days would sing in the Muslim traveller's lodge, known as the *takya*, in these languages, although not so much after 1890.

Four phases can be identified in the spiritual evolution of Sai Baba. The first was as a child under the care of a *Sufi faqir* for his first four years, and possibly also for the next twelve years with his *guru* Venkusha or Roshan Shah Miyan. The second was as a *salik*, an aspirant or traveller on the *Sufi* path, from age sixteen when he wandered around Marathwada, meditated in a cave, lived under the *neem* tree and wandered in the jungle. At this time he displayed the typical characteristics of a 'mad *faqir*'. The third was after he returned to Shirdi permanently and began to live in the dilapidated *masjid*. The fourth was from 1886 onwards as a perfectly realized soul, a level which he apparently attained after his three-day ordeal.[77] Sai Baba symbolically refers to his having achieved the stage of a perfected man (*al-insanu al-kamil*), when a young woman, on bending down at Sai Baba's feet, dropped her spectacles. Someone suggested that they should be given to Sai Baba as they had landed at his feet. The sage however said: 'I don't need spectacles, I have a pair. They cost forty Rupees.' Everyone in Shirdi knew Sai Baba did not wear glasses, but her father interpreting the enigmatic statement said that the spectacles were a symbol for God-realization and forty rupees meant forty years. If we take the forty as literal, then he may be referring to some enlightenment experience earlier than 1886, or it can merely denote a large number of years.

A devotee, in his interview with Narasimhaswami, recounted that as recently as 1935, Sai Baba was still generally perceived by the local population in Maharashtra to have been a Muslim. This is evidenced by an episode involving a Hindu cashier who, on experiencing some trouble over money not accounted for, was advised by Nachane Dahanukar to seek help at the Shirdi shrine. He initially refused because, in his own words, 'Baba was a Mahomedan'.[78] Nevertheless, he went to Shirdi and prayed there, obtained a photograph of Baba, and shortly thereafter the unhappy situation cleared up successfully.

As shown in this section, numerous examples of Sai Baba's apparent *Sufi*-Muslim background can be culled from the writings. The question as to his religious allegiance has arisen because Sai Baba was not an orthodox Muslim, and this was coupled with the fact that during the last few months and years of his life he accepted worship or *puja* with accompanying ritual from his Hindu devotees. Over the years there were many orthodox Muslims who came to Shirdi and felt that Sai Baba was being corrupted by the Hindus and that Islamic precepts were being violated when they saw the Hindus worshipping him like a deity. In the name of *Allah* they were willing to kill those offending Hindus, and, in the name of *Allah*, one was even prepared to cut Sai Baba's throat. Only the saint's extraordinary powers prevented bloodshed, and on another occasion, he had to intervene to prevent an orthodox Muslim from clubbing him to death. The Muslims felt that he was teaching a heterodox doctrine and must be stopped, whatever the cost. Sai Baba however, smilingly said, 'All that is *Allah*' evidently meaning that all the Hindu deities are manifestations of *Allah* - and with a glance rendered his attacker helpless, and sent him on his way.[79] Intolerance was also shown in the home of Pradhan, one of Sai Baba's close devotees, when Bapu, Pradhan's young son was seriously ill. The orthodox household priest Madhava Bhat blamed Sai Baba, saying that the illness had come because the family was worshipping a Moslem saint. Asking the family to pray to Dattatreya, Pradhan told him that Sai Baba was indeed Dattatreya. When the child's condition worsened, Bhat prayed to Sai Baba saying that if the child improved enough to be brought downstairs by 4 pm, he would believe he was Dattatreya. Sure enough, by 4 pm the child was able to come down and soon recovered. Bhat, being greatly impressed, kept his vow.[80]

NOTES

1. SS, 13:4.
2. Sri Sai Sharan Anand, *Sri Sai the Superman*, p. 4.
3. Bharadwaja, *Sai Baba the Master*, p. 61.
4. DE, p. 151.
5. DE, p. 180.
6. DE, p. 34.

7. *phakiri avvala badasa ahi phakiri hi cirantan rahi amiri ksana bhumgur pahi sada babani mhanave.* SS, 8:112.
8. DE, p. 255.
9. SSG, p. 24.
10. Wrestling was a popular village pastime but more of a young man's sport one would think. Ramgiri Bua recorded in *Devotees' Experiences of Sri Sai Baba* that Sai Baba did not do any wrestling, which means he never actually saw him wrestle, and this was probably true throughout the latter part of his life. DE, p. 255.
11. DE, p. 79.
12. Das Ganu, *Shri Sainath - Stavan Manjari*, verse 67.
13. SS, 42:27 Translation by Smt. Indira Kher, forthcoming publication.
14. DE, p. 279.
15. LSB, III:165.
16. DE, p. 41.
17. SS, 37:198.
18. DE, p. 151.
19. DE, p. 17.
20. DE, p. 134.
21. Idries Shah, *The Exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasrudin*, London: Pan Books Ltd., 1966. *The Subtleties of the Inimitable Mulla Nasrudin*, New York: E.P. Dutton & Co Inc, 1973. *The Pleasantries of the Incredible Mulla Nasrudin*, New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1968.
22. Shah, *The Exploits*, p. 26.
23. C&S, no 117, p. 24.
24. DE, p. 135.
25. There are a few hints that Sai Baba was more familiar with the Chishtiyya Order, for in the *Saibaba MS*, it lists the succession of Chishti masters in more detail than the other orders.
26. DE, p. 135.
27. LSB, III:179.
28. DE, p. 132.
29. DE, p. 132.
30. DE, p. 132.
31. SS, 29:70-75.
32. SSG, p.48.
33. SS, 1:33-35. Smt. Indira Kher's translation. Forthcoming publication. This story differs slightly in some of the details from that given by Gunaji in his adaptation.
34. Shepherd, *Gurus Rediscovered*, p. 19.
35. See William Donkin, *The Wayfarers: An Account of the Work of Meher Baba with the God-intoxicated, and also with Advanced Souls, Sadhus, and the Poor* (San Franscisco: Sufism Reoriented, 1969).
36. DE, p. 67.

37. See A.G. Munsiff, "Hazrat Sai Baba of Shirdi," *Meher Baba Journal.*
38. Purdom, *Shri Meher Baba*, p. 26.
39. Shepherd, *Gurus Rediscovered*, p. 5.
40. Kevin Shepherd, *Meher Baba: An Iranian Liberal* (Cambridge: Anthropographia Publications, 1986) pp. 187-88.
41. DE, p. 181.
42. Osborne, *The Incredible Sai Baba*, pp. 51-2.
43. This spelling is uniformly used in India to refer to Muslims of Afghan descent who had settled north of Delhi in the medieval age, although *Ruhullah* is probably the correct spelling.
44. SS, 2:138-39.
45. SSG, p. 14.
46. *to aso brahmana va pathana samasamana doghehi*. SS, 3:141.
47. LSB, 1:27.
48. "Kanaka O Lila," in *Purva-Banga-Gitika,* ed. D.C. Sen (Calcutta: 1923-1932), vol. I, pt. 2, p. 230.
49. Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 57.
50. Personal communication from Haja Saheb, the *pirzada* of the Banne Miyan *dargah*.
51. Purdom, *Shri Meher Baba*, p. 24.
52. DE, p. 277.
53. DE, p. 276.
54. SS, 9:54-55 *navdik nav tarik Allah miyane apna dhuniya legaya marji Allaki*.
55. DE, p. 279.
56. Subhan, *Sufism: its Saints and Shrines*, p. 197.
57. *See* Appendix A.
58. DE, p. 86.
59. DE, p. 29.
60. Bharadwaja, *Sai Baba the Master*, pp. 12-13.
61. For the rest of this book the spelling *urs* will be used.
62. SSG, p. 32.
63. Raghuvir B. Purandhare told Narasimhaswami that in 1920 Sai Baba's actual sandals were taken in procession around Shirdi. DE, p. 78. It is not clear whether the devotee meant a sandal-paste procession or a procession of the *padukas* of Sai Baba.
64. *saibaba muslman nahi mi nama karani muslamancyi payi namay karavaya he gheina mana*. SS, 12:152-56.
65. For the full story see LSB, III:177-79.
66. CS, pp. 59-60.
67. Osborne, *The Incredible Sai Baba*, p. 37.
68. CS, pp. 10-11.
69. Schimmel, *Triumphal Sun*, p. 205.

70. CS, No. 58.
71. LSB, III:152.
72. SSG, pp. 214-17.
73. The spelling of the Muslim names is that given by Gunaji and I have not altered it.
74. LSB, II:190.
75. DE, pp. 276-77.
76. DE, p. 278.
77. SSG, pp. 238-9.
78. DE, p. 56.
79. DE, pp. 10-11.
80. DE, p. 101.

CHAPTER FIVE

Sai Baba and the Maharashtrian Bhakti Movement, Its Poet - Saints and Deities

Sai Baba taught the way to God-realization by the constant and intense remembrance of God, so it is not surprising that his name has been readily associated with the poet-saints of the *Bhakti movement*, whose love for God was sung in their *abhangas,* songs and poems with the express goal of seeing and experiencing God directly. In the daily life at Shirdi the names of the great poet-saints of Maharashtra and their works would often be introduced into discussion by Sai Baba's Hindu devotees, especially during the last decade of his life. According to the reminiscences of these devotees, there was also frequent mention of Pandharpur, Lord Vitthala and the *Varkari Panth*. Traditionally, great Hindu sages, *swamis* and holy men can trace their spiritual lineage back through a long line of *gurus* or *Mahatmas*. However, Sai Baba possessed no such line of spiritual mentors. So Dabholkar, the author of Sai Baba's biography *Sri Sai Saccarita*, in order to authenticate him for Hindu devotees, tried to link him to the rich Maharashtrian spiritual tradition. In the opening paragraphs of each chapter, therefore, he eulogizes some aspect of the spirituality of Maharashtra, the wonder of the poet-saints, their birthplaces as holy pilgrimage sites and the beauties of the land, its rivers, etc., thus linking Sai Baba with it all by association. Dabholkar would be amazed and gratified to learn that today his efforts at raising the status of Shirdi as a holy place were highly successful, and that it is now the most visited pilgrimage centre in Maharashtra. While Sai Baba did not teach or quote these *bhakti* poet-saints himself, he would endorse the reading of one or other of their works, such as *Eknathi Bhagavata*, and promote them in order to further an individual's spiritual growth. The philosophy of the *Bhakti movement* and of the Maharashtrian poet-saints is very much entwined with the *Sufis*, who also fostered devotion to God and harmony between Muslims and Hindus. Some historical background has already been given on the *Sufis* in the Deccan, so the essential elements comprising the *Bhakti movement* is given in this chapter. The Hindu-Muslim climate into which Sai Baba was born in 1838, and that existed during his lifetime, can then be more readily appreciated for he is often described as the arbiter of Hindu-Muslim unity.

The Bhakti Movement

In medieval Maharashtra the evolution of the *Bhakti movement* coincided with the period of Islamic domination. While Muslim missionaries had been only marginally successful in converting Hindus to Islam, *Sufi* activity had a direct impact on the newly emerging *Bhakti movement*. Recent studies show that the *Sufis* stimulated a change in attitude towards existing traditions, such as the exclusion of low caste members from knowing and experiencing God, and they also introduced the notion of unity of Godhead. The Hindu concept of oneness of God called monism is an essential element of Vedanta also, but the teaching had been confined to members of the Brahmin caste. Many of the poet-saints of the emerging *Bhakti movement* were non-Brahmins coming from the lower castes, for in addition to Namdev who was a tailor, and Tukaram a grocer, there was Gora a potter, Samvata a gardener, Narahari a goldsmith and Cokhamela an untouchable. This group had been significantly influenced by the monotheistic *tasawwuf* which was introduced to them by the more egalitarian *Sufis* in their hospices called *khanqahs*, and who openly welcomed members of the Hindu lower castes. According to Nizami, 'there was hardly any saint of the *Bhakti* school who had not passed some of his time in a *khanqah*'.[1]

The lives of seven of the most influential *bhakti* poet-saints of Maharashtra spanned a period of five hundred years, from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Four of these were Hindu *bhaktas*: Jnanesvar, Namdev, Eknath and Tukaram; and three were *Sufis*: Shah Muntoji, Shekh Mahammad and Shah Muni. All of them had a profound influence on the spiritual history of Maharashtra. The stories of the Hindu *bhaktas* are included in this chapter, and those of the *Sufi* saints, Shah Muntoji, Shekh Mahammad and Shah Muni are given in the next chapter. A discussion on concepts which they held in common is given in chapter seven.

The first real champion of Vitthala *bhakti* was Jnanesvar, who authored a commentary on the *Bhagavad-Gita* in Marathi, known as the *Jnanesvari*. Jnanesvar lived just prior to the advent of the Muslim entry into Maharashtra in 1296, which occurred just three years before his death. According to Ranade, the shrine of Vitthala was probably built some years before the time of Jnanesvar, as a shrine in memory of Pundalika, a Canarese saint, or as a temple to Shiva. Jnanesvar was followed by the tailor Namdev who, while being a contemporary of his, outlived him by more than 50 years, and was, therefore, seriously affected by the Muslim entry into India. Namdev wrote thousands of devotional songs known as *abhangas*, and, according to Ranade, 'was probably the greatest of the early *kirtan* performers, or singers of the praise of God'.[2] According to Namdev, the intuitive faculty for realising God is inborn and is a gift from God. He likens it to the instincts of animals:

> A cow gives birth to a calf in the forest:
> Who sends the calf to the udders of the cow?
> Who teaches the young one of a serpent the art of biting?
> A Mogara flower stands of itself at the top of a creeper
> Who teaches it to be fragrant?...
> Similarly, the faculty of realizing God is a native faculty,
> And by that alone will one be able to realize God.[3]

After the death of Namdev in 1350, a dark period of close to 200 years ensued when the Muslims dominated northern and western India. Eknath, the poet-saint of Paithan, who lived from 1533 to 1599, became the next poet-saint to be instrumental in revitalizing the *Bhakti movement*.[4] One of the most famous of the Marathi *bhakti* saints, he was a prolific author and composer of religious tracts in Marathi. According to Tulpule, Eknath stood at the confluence of three different religious currents, namely the Dattatreya *sampradaya*, the *Varkari panth* and the *Sufis*. There is a blend of Hinduism and Sufism inherent in the Dattatreya sect which is illustrated by Janardhan Swami, the *guru* of Eknath. Bendre has shown from evidence in the *Yogasamgrama* by Shekh Mahammad that Janardhan Swami was a disciple of a *Sufi* of the Qadiriyya Order called Chand Bodhale.[5] Bodhale's real name was Sayyid Candasahib Qadiri as mentioned in the genealogy of the *Sufi* Qadiriyya Order.[6] Previously, the historian Dhere was of the opinion that Chand Bodhale was born a Brahmin and later adopted Muslim *Sufi* practices and the *Sufi* mode of dress and behaviour.[7] Chand Bodhale's Muslim identity is established in that his *dargah* is well-known in Maharashtra and his *urs* is celebrated every year by both Hindus and Muslims. Tulpule then re-examines the story given by Eknath that Dattatreya appeared to him as a *Sufi malang* or ascetic, and he argues that identifying Eknath's *guru* Janardhan Swami as a Hindu 'is a clever twist of the historical truth' in order to hide the fact that his *guru* was a Qadiri *Sufi*.[8] Eknath evidently sought to conceal this fact to avoid upsetting the orthodox Brahmins by tracing his spiritual lineage to the god Dattatreya. Janardhan Swami had other Muslim connections not least of which was that he was in the service of the Muslim rulers and was in charge of the fort of Daulatabad, renamed by the Muslims from its original name of Devagiri, and his shrine still lies within the walls of the fort. If Eknath's *guru/pir* was indeed a *Sufi*, this would explain Eknath's extraordinary understanding of the finer points and nuances of Hindu versus Muslim teachings as evidenced in his *bharud* or drama-poem entitled *Hindu Turk Samvad* or 'A debate between a Hindu and Muslim'.[9]

Eknath's connection with the *Varkari panth* sprang from his great grandfather Bhanudasa who lived between 1448 and 1513, and who holds a special place in its history. When the Muslims invaded Maharashtra the image of the deity Vitthala[10] was taken from Pandharpur to Hampi, the capital of the Hindu empire of Vijayanagar in the south, for safe-keeping. It was Bhanudasa who retrieved it and restored it again to Pandharpur when the politico-religious atmosphere changed. Eknath was brought up by his grandfather, and as his writing reveals he was a Vitthala *bhakta*. With such a rich spiritual background, Dattatreya, *varkari* and *Sufi*, Eknath strove to promote a harmonious relationship, especially between Hindus and Muslims, by emphasising the message of *bhakti*. As Zelliot points out, through his *bharuds* he was able to put his message into the mouths of the lower castes, untouchables, women, unorthodox sects, Muslim *faqirs*, acrobats, travelling entertainers, prostitutes and unhappy women, not in the elevated Sanskrit of Brahmanical scholarship, but using instead the common language of the people, Marathi.[11] Zelliot sees the *sants* and their verses and *bharuds* as promoting a link between the two cultures. As Wagle infers, Eknath's *Hindu-Turk Samvad* served to highlight the intensity of religious tensions and polemics, yet exposed the essentially trivial nature of the differences between the two communities.[12] Through this dialogue, social questions, points of religious grievance and inconsistencies on both sides were aired, and the dialogue even becomes hostile with recrimination at times. For example, the Muslim could not reconcile himself to the Hindu view that God possesses hands and feet and that God can be worshipped as a stone idol. In replying to this charge, the Hindu comments that the Muslim must be atheist if he cannot see that God is at the core of all beings, and that God must therefore be present within water, wood and stone. In turn he accusingly asks the Muslim to explain, if prayer is five times a day facing west in the direction of the *Ka'ba* in Mecca, what happens in all the other times and at all the other compass points. The Hindu eagerly points out that God is everywhere and even the Muslim's holy book the *Qur'an* says that God is everpresent. The problem of conversion, a serious grievance for Hindus, was included in this debate: 'Both Hindu and Musalman are God's creation, brother. (But) observe the determination of the Turk; he has to catch a Hindu and make him a Muslim.'[13] After a long banter Eknath concludes: 'They (Hindu-Turk) greeted each other and with respect they embraced.... The dispute resulted in a settlement. From differing views a consensus was achieved.' Thus in the sixteenth century, at the social level, there was discussion, dispute, misunderstanding and even hatred between ordinary Hindus and Muslims, but at the higher religious plane there was an apparent unity, understanding and compromise. This type of appeal for a symbiotic, harmonious relationship between Hindus and Muslims would be a constant theme of all the saints throughout the succeeding centuries.

Eknath lived in the ancient city of Paithan where his name and *abhangas* are still kept alive, and where the temple he frequented is still in daily use. The saint of Paithan propounded a new type of *bhakti*, an emotional surrender to God, which found expression in his well-known *Eknathi Bhagavata*, a Marathi rendering of the Sanskrit *Bhagavata Purana*, which has become a loved and revered text in Maharashtra. For the educated Hindu and Brahmin devotees who visited Sai Baba during his last eight years, Sai Baba often recommended that they read the *Eknathi Bhagavata*, as well as other Hindu texts.

Tukaram, the *bhakti* poet-saint who lived in the seventeenth century between 1608-1650, is the most celebrated, influential and most often-quoted of all of the Marathi poet-saints. Through his own sad personal experience as a young man, Tukaram had an affinity with the sufferings of the common man, being especially sympathetic to the trials of the lower castes.[14] During the preceding three centuries there had been Muslim infiltration causing religious intolerance and political intrigue, and during Tukaram's lifetime Maharashtra was in turmoil. At his birth the whole of the north was under Mughal rule, which gradually advanced to capture all the rest of the Muslim kingdoms to the south. Tukaram sought to awaken the peasants into resisting the hostile influences by reviving greater pride in their ancient religion. But at the same time Tukaram rejected the rigidity and evils of the traditional caste system and was committed to introducing a revolutionary spirit of equality, brotherhood and monotheism. Tukaram also ridiculed the prolific Hindu pantheon, elevating the status of Vitthala as the one true God. (*see* Plate 18 showing a black *murti* of Tukaram, still adorned daily with flowers, in his birthplace of Dehu near Pune, with the deity Vitthala and his consort Rukmini, in the background). Thus the *Varkari panth*, to which Tukaram belonged, acted as a democratizing influence and as a counterpoise to the formalism of Islam and the exclusivity of the Brahmins. The *bhakti* saints of the *Varkari panth* accepted *advaita* as oneness with the universal God, but rejected the traditional idea that one had to abandon society in order to achieve God-realization.[15] Tukaram was greatly influenced by Jnanesvar, Namdev and Eknath, and is considered to be 'the crown jewel' of the *Varkari panth*. His verses tell his own story of a soul's progress from worldly life to the attainment of God-realization, and the ineffable joy and powers attained from the direct experience of God.

During the medieval period in Maharashtra there developed the worship of two deities, Vitthala, alternately known as Vithoba or Panduranga, and Dattatreya, both of whom have remained unique to this region to this day. Over the centuries the charismatic poet-saints built and developed the *Varkari panth* whose devotees worship Vitthala at Pandharpur, and travel twice a year on pilgrimage there. The evolution of the *Varkari* sect has been likened to a temple, whose foundation was established by Jnanesvar, whose superstructure was erected by Namdev and Eknath, and whose steeple or highest pinnacle was placed by Tukaram.[16] It was Jnanesvar who inspired devotion to the deity Vitthala in Pandharpur, but it was Namdev who popularized and intensified it. The cult was centred in Pandharpur on the Bhima river, which became a huge pilgrimage centre, where devotional fervour washed away all linguistic, cultural and caste differences among the devotees. The *paduka* pilgrimage to Pandharpur remains to this day a major religious event.

The Maharashtrian Deity - Vitthala

'*Vitthala, Hey Vitthala, Panduranga Vitthala*'

The echoes of this popular *bhajan* can still be heard all over Maharashtra, and the divine name Vitthala has entered into the vocabulary of traditional Indian *bhajans* and *kirtans*. The deity Vitthala is revered as an aspect of Vishnu or his *avatar* Krishna[17]

The *murti* of Vitthala depicts 'the deity standing upon a brick, his arms akimbo.' *Vit* in Marathi means brick, and no other deity has this unique stance, a posture which is not otherwise found in Indian iconography (*see* Plate 19). Tukaram described it thus:

> Beautiful is the image standing upon a brick
> With his hands upon his hips
> On his head is a tulasi wreath
> On his loins is a yellow silk garment
> This image is my everlasting delight.[18]

While the name Vitthala refers on the one hand to the deity having an image and a temple at Pandharpur, on the other hand it refers to the invisible formless Godhead. The emphasis placed by Islam on the formlessness of God is apparent here, for while Vitthala is recognised as beyond form, devotees felt the need for the focus of a form.[19] Undoubtedly Brahman (God) within Hinduism is formless, but Islam brought with it a new awareness. While Maharashtrian poet-saints are often termed *sants*, the term is more generally reserved by scholars to refer to devotees of God in his *nirguna, nirakara* - without qualities, formless - aspect, which is associated more with the northern Indian *sants* such as Kabir, Guru Nanak, and Dadu Dayal.[20] The Maharashtra poet-saints are considered to be a separate branch, termed southern *sants*, because they worshipped the *saguna* form (God with qualities) such as that of Vitthala, while recognising that in an ultimate sense Vitthala too was formless. There is an implied assumption that the formless God is somehow more valid than a deity with form. However, Eknath, one of the foremost Maharashtrian *sants*, challenged this common assumption when he sings in one of his verses: 'Who says that the *saguna* is lesser than the *nirguna*?'[21]

The Vitthala *bhaktas* consider themselves to be part of the *sant* tradition in so far as they believe that ultimately 'it is not the Vitthala icon that grants salvation, but devotion to the name of God, the invisible, all-pervading Godhead.'[22] The core *Varkari* teaching is encapsulated in the refrain from Jnanesvar's *Haripatha* or poems of praise to Hari: Invoke, invoke the name of Hari. The merit [so acquired] who can count?[23] The cult of

Vitthala is not a church or sect and, according to Deleury, is open to all, has no centralised organisation, no hierarchy, no general councils, no credo, and no sacraments.[24] Dhere further holds that the Vitthala *bhaktas* have, 'through their liberal and lofty vision, attained in a felicitous manner a synthesis in Vitthala, of Saiva, Vaisnava, Buddhist, Jaina and other conflicting religious streams'.[25] The *Sufi* influence is manifested in the notion of equality and brotherhood of man that is apparent among the *Varkari* pilgrims who travel twice a year to visit Pandharpur. They and all the southern *sants* rejected caste differences saying that all who sing the praises of God, by whatever name He may be known, are equal.

Thus the essential nature of the cult of Vitthala was devotional rather than organisational, consisting of groups gathered around a saint at Pandharpur, singing the names of God, a practice which still continues today after six centuries. Various traditions and numerous castes, including women, *Sufis* and Muslims could all be accommodated within the devotional *Varkari* fold. The *Varkari* pilgrims, the name being derived from those who vow to go on pilgrimage twice a year (*vari*) to Pandharpur, bear special *padukas*, mounted on a *palki* or special cart or palanquin, in procession from each of the shrine-centres of the poet-saints around Maharashtra. *Padukas,* after being worn by a saintly figure, are held to retain his *shakti-pat* or spiritual power, and are the actual sandals, or silver sandals worn by the saint, or his existing footprints. The various *padukas* of the great *bhakti* saints in Maharashtra would be taken on *palkis* by the *Varkaris* singing *bhajans* all the way to Pandharpur, each setting off at an appropriate time from their place, in order that all should arrive simultaneously. They travelled from Alandi with the *padukas* of Jnanesvar, from Paithan with those of Eknath, from Dehu with those of Tukaram, etc...[26]

Many late nineteenth and early twentieth century devotees of Vitthala, while en route to Pandharpur, would break their journey at Shirdi in order to get the *darshan* of the living saint, Sai Baba. Sai Baba encouraged devotion to God and the following story illustrates that he encouraged the worship of Vitthala for those for whom he was their family deity. Bhagwantrao Kshirasaga's father was a great devotee of Vitthala worshipping his image at home and was a *varkari*, undertaking regular pilgrimages to Pandharpur. When he died, Sai Baba knew that his son had stopped the worship, the offerings and the pilgrimage, so for the sake of this great devotee, Sai Baba drew Bhagwantrao to Shirdi and revitalized his devotion to Vitthala.[27] Sai Baba promoted the love of God by whatever name or form appealed to the individual, for he uniquely declared that he himself embodied all deities, whether Ram, Krishna, Mahalaxmi, Dattatreya, Maruti, or indeed 'Vithoba of Pandhari'.[28] In conformity with the *paduka* tradition of Maharashtrian *varkaris*, Sai Baba, in order to please his Hindu devotees, submitted to his own *pada puja* or worship of his own feet. Mrs Pradhan had a dream in her home in Santa Cruz, Bombay, that Sai Baba asked her to do *pada puja*. Chandorkar interpreted it to mean she should have silver *padukas* or sandals made and go to Shirdi. Arriving there Sai Baba called her and stretched out his feet and told her to place the *padukas* on his feet and take them and worship them. Mystically he told Chandorkar, "See Mother has cut off and carried away my feet".[29] After this it became popular to secure silver *padukas*, have them blessed by being placed on the feet of Sai Baba and then to worship them at home on the altar, a practice which devotees have revived recently in the worship of Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

Das Ganu, the famous *kirtankar* of Sai Baba, was a staunch devotee of Vitthala who made regular trips to Pandharpur. According to the hagiography, one day Sai Baba turned to Das Ganu and asked him to hold a seven-day *namasaptah* or repetition of God's name. Das Ganu agreed on condition that Vitthala would manifest at the end of the seven days. Sai Baba touched his chest in agreement saying: "Yes indeed the image of Vitthala will manifest but you should have total devotion to Vitthala. Vitthala will then, out of love for his devotee, give *darshan* by granting a vision of himself".[30] Sai Baba went on to explain that "the Pandhari of Vitthal" was in Shirdi, meaning himself, and the way to get Vitthala to manifest was for the devotee to be overflowing with intense love and devotion. He would use the name of Vitthala and Khandoba or Maruti (also known as Hanuman) interchangeably, while to Upasani Maharaj one day he referred to the Khandoba temple in which he lived as Vitthala's temple. On being corrected Sai Baba merely asked: "What is the difference between Khandoba and Vitthala?"[31] A 95 year-old *varkari* and worshipper of Vitthala named Goulibuva, who had gone for years to Pandharpur and then on to Shirdi, eventually recognized Sai Baba as 'Pandharinath Vitthal incarnate' or that the Lord of Pandharpur, the deity Vitthala, had taken human form as Sai Baba.[32] Thus, it can be seen that Sai Baba used the Maharashtrian history and spiritual tradition as a backdrop for his own message that all names and forms of deities are manifestations of the one God.

The Maharashtrian Deity - Dattatreya

By the end of the fourteenth century, Dattatreya, the second uniquely Maharashtrian deity re-emerged. At this period there was much conflict between Muslims and Hindus, and a bridge was needed to unite the two communities. Dattatreya, an ancient *Puranic* figure who had united Vaisnavas and Saivas in the past, was re-invigorated in Maharashtra, this time to unite Hindus and Muslims. The cult of Dattatreya became a blend of Hinduism and Islam, centred around two figures, Sripada Srivallabha and Narasimha Saraswati, who were deemed to be *avataras* of Dattatreya, also known as Shree Guru. Their lives and stories were chronicled by Gangadhar Saraswati in the *Shree Guru Caritra*, a work which has become sacred to the Marathi people.[33]

Dattatreya's immediate image is that of an ascetic, who is portrayed as an incarnation of the triad of Hindu gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva in one form. This form is described in the *Avadhuta Gita* as 'one image, three gods' (*eka murti trayo devah*).[34] Iconographically, Dattatreya is often depicted as a figure with the three heads of the above deities on one body. Dattatreya worship is associated by the Hindus with a type of ascetic known both as a *malang*, a term also used in Maharashtra for a *Sufi*, and as an *avadhuta* which is defined as one who has cast off all worldly attachments. According to Mokashi-Punekar, although the *avadhutas* were considered to be 'crazy eccentrics' in Maharashtra, they were recognised to be spiritually beyond caste, cult and social conventions.[35] They are described in the literature as fraternizing with Muslim *Sufis* and they were the earliest group to do so, seeing no essential difference between the *Sufis* and themselves.[36]

The cult of Dattatreya was again revitalized in the nineteenth century, when numerous incarnations of Dattatreya were identified among the various Hindu and *Sufi* saints of Maharashtra. The two saints most closely identified with Dattatreya were Sri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot, who passed away in 1878, and Sai Baba of Shirdi. Among others in Maharashtra who were recognised as incarnations of the deity were Manikaprabhu (1817-1865), Vasudevananda Saraswati (1854-1914), Ganda Maharaj (1869-1938), Sri Pant Maharaja Balekundrikar (1855-1905)[37], Sri Noori Maharaja (1869-1923), Sri Sridatta Maharaja of Aste (1894-1925), and Sri Narayana Maharaj of Kedgaon (1885-1945).[38] Most of the saints in question were very reticent about revealing their origins, seeming intent upon remaining private and unknown except to a select few. There is a tradition in India that a *guru* who proclaims himself is not a true *guru*, and this holds true for the Dattatreya incarnations, who were known only to spiritual seekers. When questioned about their personal histories their answers would be paradoxical, enigmatic and often contradictory. Would-be biographers of reputed nineteenth-century Dattatreya incarnations have found it exceedingly difficult to trace birth dates, parentage and early life history in almost all cases. This holds true for both Sri Akkalkot Maharaj and Sri Sai Baba who were held to be incarnations of Dattatreya, for neither revealed their birth, parentage and early years, facts which are still in the realm of conjecture.

Shri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot is recognized by many to be one of Maharashtra's greatest saints. This Swami was extremely unorthodox, treating Hindus and Muslims equally and having equal respect for temples and *mosques, dargahs* and *samadhis*, as well having a total disregard for caste, treating touchables and untouchables alike. Like many spiritual masters the autobiographical details of Sri Swami Samarth's human life were of no importance to him, so he did not reveal them, but it is known that he settled in Akkalkot in 1856, around the time Sai Baba went to Shirdi. However, the Swami did indicate that he was an incarnation of Sri Narsimha Saraswati, the thirteenth century saint who was accepted as an incarnation of the deity Dattatreya.

Dattatreya is often described as an *avadhuta*, meaning one who had cast off attachments to the world, and Swami Akkalkot was in the same mould. Similarities with Sai Baba are again present, both sharing a reticence to reveal personal details of their autobiographies, and both possessing no real name, being merely known by titles bestowed upon them by devotees. (*see* Plate 20 showing a painting which links Akkalkot Maharaj (centre), Gajanan Maharaj (right) and Sai Baba (left) as avatars of Dattatreya (above)). Sri Swami Samarth Maharaj is not so much a name as a series of courtesy titles, which assume his origin to be Hindu. This was also the case with Sai Baba, both words being epithets rather than names *per se*, assuming his *Sufi* origin. They both had similar miracles attributed to them. On one occasion a Muslim named Ahmad Ali Khan met Swami Samarth and, taking him for a madman, asked if he would like a smoke. The Swami readily agreed and Khan gave him an empty chilim and told him derisively to smoke that. Innocently the Swami took the pipe and began to puff, and smoke and fire became visible. The Muslim fell at his feet.[39] In a similar hagiography, Sai Baba offered Chand Patil a *chilim* to smoke. They were out in the countryside and there was no fire or water immediately available. Sai Baba is said to have tapped the ground with his *satka* (stick) and smoking embers appeared from which they lit the pipe, then he tapped again and water appeared with which to soak the *chhapi* (cloth) through which the smoke was drawn.[40] Another instance of similarity was the ability to turn water into oil. The story is told of Swami Samarth being invited by a close devotee to share his rich harvest in the field where they lit a fire to roast the grain. While there the Swami took mouthfuls of water and spat them into the fire. This behaviour would normally dampen a fire down but the reverse occurred. The flames blazed up very brightly as if *ghee* (oil) had been sprinkled on the fire.[41] Likewise Sai Baba, when refused oil for his lamps by a conspiracy among the village shop-keepers, went home and, observed by these same men, first filled his oil can with water and taking a few mouthfuls spat them back into the can. Thereafter he filled his little lamps from the can and lit them and they glowed all night long, just as if they had been filled with oil.[42] There are also innumerable instances of similarity between the two saints in their *antarjnana* (clairvoyance). One day, Babaji Sadoba who visited Akkalkot regularly on Sundays, was told by the Swami to stay saying, 'the river has crossed the bank'. But Sadoba was restless thinking that he must attend the office the next morning, so he slipped away to the railway station only to find that the river had risen and the railway bridge was submerged. He thus spent a cold night at the station! There are numerous similar stories recorded in the literature concerning Sai Baba's refusal to permit devotees to leave Shirdi, and invariably the individuals who ignored the saint's commands, later regretted their decision when their vehicles broke down or trains were late or violent storms put them in danger. In the same way it was impossible to take a photograph against the wishes of these saints. A British Governor, hearing of Swami Samarth's greatness, sent a photographer to take his picture, but he found he was unable to take one even after trying for a long time. Finally he managed but found that everyone saw a different deity when shown the 'photo'. Eventually, after first obtaining permission, he was able to take one.[43] In the case of Sai Baba too, he would not let his photograph be taken without his permission. There is a famous photo, which is still extant, showing a few individuals with a smudge in the middle. This was a group photograph taken without Sai Baba's permission, and the part of the picture where Sai Baba was standing is smudged and unrecognizable.

Swami Samarth Maharaj was ostensibly a Hindu but on one occasion a Muslim devotee called upon him mentally for help. This devotee named Jamadar was a prison supervisor and one day one of his prisoners escaped. He prayed for help to the Swami, vowing that if the prisoner returned he would give up his job and devote himself to serving the saint. The run-away prisoner was soon caught, and told this extraordinary story. He was hiding near a canal and was about to run away, when a *sadhu* came and, due to the power of his gaze, he could not move. The next morning a constable came along and re-arrested him. Jamadar realised that this must have been the Swami, so resigned his post and went to Akkalkot to serve him in order to fulfill his vow. After he had spent some time in the saint's service, the Swami flung his wooden shoes at him and told him to go. Recognising that he was being given holy *padukas*, he took them away and worshipped them, although his fellow Muslims thought this was idol-worship and shunned him. He went away and established the *padukas* elsewhere and found that people began flocking to him and that he could effect cures with the dust from the 'feet' of Swami. He soon became celebrated throughout Maharashtra as Peer Saheb Maharaj.[44] A similar instance occurred with Sai Baba, but the opposite way. Ostensibly a Muslim, Sai Baba spiritually uplifted his Brahmin devotee, Kasinath Upasani, who later became the well-known guru and swami Sri Upasani Maharaj, with a large following in the 1930's. Thus, powers attained by great saints are often similar and transcend sectarian boundaries.

Many of these saints were considered God-intoxicated, known as *unmatta* or plain crazy or mad by the layman. The very name *ganda* of the saint Ganda Maharaj means mad, a name given to him because of his strange behaviour. Even the *Sufi* mystic Tajuddin Baba spent eighteen years in a lunatic asylum before he was finally recognised as one of the *awliya* or great *Sufi* saints. The outward behaviour of the noted saint Sri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot seemed very strange and childlike, to the point where it even exceeded the bounds of decency.[45] Similarly in the early years at Shirdi, Sai Baba was often taken for a crazy or mad man *(veda faqir)* who begged for broken pieces of dry bread from the villagers. His saintly qualities were seemingly only recognised by other saints, one of whom thought his talents were wasted in Shirdi, and called him 'a *chintamani* or diamond on a dung-heap'.[46] Later on, during their lifetimes, Sai Baba and Narayan Maharaj were not only recognized as incarnations of Dattatreya, but were also named as cosmic *qutbs* or Perfect masters by Meher Baba.

Born in 1885, Narayan Maharaj's parents died when he was very young, and after wandering as a young boy he renounced the world and, at age fifteen, felt he had a divine call to go to Gangapur. Gangapur is revered as the holy place of Sri Narasimha Saraswati, who was held to be an incarnation of Lord Dattatreya, and the site of his holy *padukas*. After some years of penance, repeating the name of God, sitting under a *neem* tree in Sangama a few miles from Gangapur, and therefore close to the *padukas* of Dattatreya, he finally settled in Kedgaon. He was renowned for his vow never to beg anything from anyone. He was a strict vegetarian and ardent *bhakta*, and had a great many followers. He built a beautiful temple in Kedgaon and dedicated it to Dattatreya, and was highly regarded as an incarnation of that deity. Narayan Maharaj, although similar in many respects to other saints, was unusual in that he liked to live in a grand style, and wear fine clothes and wore a diamond ring on his finger. A number of miracles are attributed to him, and one is particularly interesting as it is attested to by Professor Woodhouse, who published his own experience of the saint in the *Times of India*.[47] It is of special interest here, as this miracle bears many similarities with one performed by Sai Baba. Professor Woodhouse had been out hunting and became very thirsty, but found himself on a hill with no possibility of finding water close by. He came upon the Maharaj sitting on top of this hill, and amazingly he soon found a stream from which he was able to quench his thirst. The stream disappeared soon after he had refreshed himself. As a result, many people were attracted to visit both the hill and Sri Narayan himself.[48] A similar incident, cited earlier, concerns Sai Baba's close devotee Nana Chandorkar who was out walking on the barren Harischandra hill many miles from Shirdi, when he declared that he was very thirsty. Sai Baba intervened and helped Chandorkar to find water.[49]

The question then arises as to why Sai Baba is said to be an incarnation of Dattatreya? A description of the attributes and qualities of Dattatreya is given in an invocation to Dattatreya forming part of the *Dattatreyopanisad*, which sets forth the main parameters of the deity.

> Aum, I salute Dattatreya who will be pleased with mere remembrance of him. He will drive away the greatest fear. He gives us the highest spiritual knowledge. He is always bliss personified. In outward appearance he sometimes behaves like a boy, sometimes a madman and sometimes like a ghost. He is a great controller of the senses. He is always an *avadhuta*. He is an ascetic, who renounced worldly attachments and connections...He is a great fulfiller of desire. I salute him...he must be worshipped uttering Aum Aum.[50]

Dattatreya in his *avadhuta* manifestation might well apply to the life of Sai Baba. Sai Baba was a celibate ascetic all his life; he had no possessions beyond a *danda* or short stick and a chilim or pipe, with no attachment to any physical things or even people. Dattatreya urged his devotees merely to remember to call his name as the first sentence of the invocation indicates. Sai Baba also said: 'Those who perpetually repeat my name reach their Goal. Simply say 'Sai, Sai' with heart over-flowing.'[51] The invocation promises Dattatreya will drive away the greatest fear. One of Sai Baba's memorable sayings is 'Why fear when I am here?', which has become a maxim and has given rise to a well-known *bhajan* within the Sai Movement.[52] Like Dattatreya, there are several stories which show that many people thought that Sai Baba was also a madman. This was particularly true in his early days in Shirdi, where he was perceived to be a mad *faqir*. Sai Baba would often get exceedingly angry, his eyes would blaze and go red, and even towards the end of his life Narayan Ashram says that Sai Baba had 'fits of rage' that seemed ungovernable, but that his towering passion soon cooled down.[53] Often the popular perception of one who does not obey a set of rules or observances is that he is a madman; however, as was shown earlier there was a rationale behind his seemingly bizarre actions. Like Dattatreya, Sai Baba's aim was also to fulfil desires. Sai Baba is reputed to have said that 'saints exist to give their devotees temporal and spiritual benefits.'[54] He expected that people would be attracted to him first to fulfil their material desires, then, 'comfortably placed in life, they [would] follow me and progress further.'[55]

The invocation goes on to declare that Dattatreya must be worshipped, and Sai Baba at the end of his life was worshipped not only as Dattatreya himself, but also as the embodiment of all deities. Sai Baba reportedly answered prayers and vows made to Dattatreya. When a previously childless couple brought their son to Sai Baba, he asked them: 'Are you proud of your son? It was as a result of your prayer to Dattatreya at Gangapur that I tore up this body and gave you a son. There was no male progeny in your own destiny.'[56] It was also reported that two devotees of Dattatreya came from Goa to visit Sai Baba, and from one he demanded *daksina* (money offering) of Rs.15, but absolutely refused to take Rs.35 offered willingly by the second man. When questioned on the logic of this demand, Sai Baba revealed that in the past the first man had prayed to Dattatreya to help him to find a good job, making the vow that if this occurred he would donate the amount of the first month's salary to Dattatreya. A good job was soon secured for Rs.15 a month, but he forgot to fulfil his vow. The second man, although he also requested a favour, made no such vow, so was not in debt to Dattatreya when he received his request.[57]

Sai Baba also reportedly revealed himself as Dattatreya in brief visions mainly to those individuals whose family deity was Dattatreya. He never actually declared his identity in so many words until well after his death, when he appeared to Mamkevala of Ahmedabad in a vision and said:

> I am not a *faqir*, I am Lord Dattatreya himself. The Lord Datta is carrying on his divine ministration in the forms of the saints, Tajuddin Baba of Nagpur, Dhuniwala Dada of Khandwa, Vishnudevananda Saraswati who lives on the banks of the Narmada, Sri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot and myself.[58]

Sai Baba's numerous indications of his identity with Dattatreya have been recorded. He was sometimes extolled by his devotees as the ever-present invisible Dattatreya. In the *arati* dedicated to Sai Baba it is said:

> Oh Sai Baba....in the Kali age, you the all-pervasive Datta have really incarnated as *sagun* Brahma.... Sai ever lives, as also the previous incarnation of God Dattatreya, Sri Narasimha Saraswati of Gangapur. His passing away is only an outward aspect, but really he pervades all animate and inanimate things and is their inner controller and ruler. This can be and is even now experienced by many who surrender themselves completely to Him, and worship him with whole-hearted devotion.[59]

Sai Baba reportedly gave a vision of himself as the infant Dattatreya to Balwant Khojakar, who was in Shirdi for the *Datta jayanti* celebrations (birthday of Dattatreya) in mid-December of 1911. At sunset, the traditional time of birth of Dattatreya according to the *Puranas*, in place of Sai Baba seated in his usual spot in the *masjid*, Khojakar saw a charming three-faced infant, then the vision reverted back to Sai Baba again.[60] There are other occasions when devotees of Dattatreya came to the *masjid* expecting to see Sai Baba, but saw the three-headed form of Dattatreya instead. One of these occasions was in 1900, and involved a relative of Nana Chandorkar who was a Dattatreya devotee with no faith in Sai Baba, and who was unhappy with the apparent worship of the person of Sai Baba. Suddenly, Sai Baba appeared before his eyes as Dattatreya with three heads. So powerful and convincing was this experience for him that he remained an ardent devotee of Sai Baba for the rest of his life.[61] Sai Baba on numerous occasions manifested to individual devotees in the form of God which they personally worshipped - Sri Rama, Vitthala, Maruti, Ganesa, Satyanarayana, Krishna, Khandoba - as well as Dattatreya. This point corresponds to the *upanisadic* concept of Dattatreya being all the gods, and his pervasive ability to manifest himself in any form at any time. Such incidents narrated by the biographers had the effect of indicating Sai Baba's divine status, omniscience and identity as Dattatreya. Such identification may have also served to reiterate Sai Baba's teaching that the various deities are but facets of the one God.

Dabholkar and the Maharashtrian Spiritual Tradition

G.R.Dabholkar, in his Marathi biography of Sai Baba, *Sri Sai Saccarita*, shows himself to be fully conversant with the Maharashtrian Hindu *bhakti* tradition of poet-saints. He was able to draw from this spiritual heritage the understanding of God as both formless and with form, the concept of equality of all devotees, and the pivotal importance of repeating the name of God. He could well understand Sai Baba's devotees' association, firstly with Vitthala and the tradition of worshipping the *padukas* and secondly, their identification of Sai Baba with Dattatreya. When Dabholkar wrote the *Sri Sai Saccarita* he used this Hindu background information to elucidate the teachings of Sai Baba. He tried to accommodate the Muslim Sai Baba within the Maharashtrian Hindu milieu for his readers. Apparently Dabholkar modelled his biography of Sai Baba on the sacred work *Sree Guru Caritra*. At the beginning of each chapter of the *Sree Guru Caritra*, there is a paragraph or two extolling the virtues and merits of the saints of sixteenth-century Maharashtra. Similarly Dabholkar takes a few paragraphs at the beginning of each of his chapters to extol Sai Baba, linking him with the great poet-saints and the spiritual heritage of Maharashtra. When Hari Sitaram Dixit wrote the foreword to the *Sri Sai Saccarita* on 20 November 1930, it only consisted of 44 chapters, concluding with Sai Baba's demise. In order to conform to the paradigm of the *Shree Guru Caritra*, seven more chapters plus an epilogue and an epitome were added, in order to make up a total of 53 chapters. Dixit, who was a close Hindu devotee of Sai Baba, always referred to Sai Baba as Sai Maharaj, and avoided the issue of whether Sai Baba was born Hindu or Muslim by declaring him to have been born '*ayoniya*' which is literally without a womb or not born of a human mother. In the Foreword, he comments that although non-devotees would find this impossible to believe, he himself believed that it was true. All incarnations of Divinity in the Hindu tradition are said to be *ayoniya*, thus laying the foundation for the idea of Sai Baba being a divine incarnation.[62]

Steeped in Maharashtrian history and being familiar with its *bhakti* saints and sacred literature, Dabholkar was also aware of all its Hindu-Muslim conflicts and attempts at symbiosis. Although he placed Sai Baba in an essentially Hindu setting, he subsequently had to confront the Muslim and *Sufi* aspects of Sai Baba. The overall impression in reading his biography of Sai Baba in Marathi is that Dabholkar personally regarded Sai Baba as a Muslim, although he was limited in fully understanding Sai Baba's Muslim-*Sufi* identity due to his own ignorance of Islam and Sufism in Maharashtra. He nevertheless consciously links Sai Baba with Maharashtrian *bhakti* saints. In the opening chapter of *Sri Sai Saccarita*, after paying homage to all the Hindu deities and ancient *rishis*, Dabholkar proceeds to pay homage to the Maharashtrian Hindu *bhakti* saints: Nivritti, Jnanesvar, Sopan, Muktabai, Janardan, Eknath, Tukaram, Kanha and Narahari. He fails to mention any Muslim saints or famous *Sufis*, although there were many whose names were quite famous in Maharashtra. In chapter four of his work he links Sai Baba and his advent in the Ahmadnagar District near the Godavari river, again mentioning these Maharashtrian saints, many of whom also lived on or near the banks of the Godavari. In addition to the previous list of saints he adds: Gora, Gonnai, Narahari, Narsi, Sajjan, Savanta, and Ramdas, all well-known in Maharashtra. This appears to be a deliberate attempt by Dabholkar to situate Sai Baba within a well-established tradition.[63]

Through his writing, Dabholkar took pains to elevate Sai Baba's shrine in Shirdi into a place of pilgrimage. He gave examples of the well-known shrines of the *bhakti* poet-saints whose villages of origin in Maharashtra had been transformed into pilgrimage sites: Jnaneswar of Alandi, Eknath of Paithan and Tukaram of Dehu. Elsewhere Dabholkar likened Shirdi to great holy sites throughout India, such as Pandharpur, Jagannath, Dwaraka and Banares. He especially emphasizes the pilgrimage centre of Pandharpur, and its deity Vitthala, which is of paramount importance in Maharashtra, making frequent references to Vitthala, Pandharpur, and the *Varkari* tradition. According to the *Sri Sai Saccarita*, a number of Sai Baba's devotees worshipped Vitthala and regularly visited Pandharpur. Das Ganu and Kakasaheb Dixit were both Vitthala *bhaktas* and wanted Sai Baba to grant them visions of their deity. Sai Baba indicated that he himself embodied the essence of Vitthala when he asked them: "Will Vithal [*sic*] come here from some outside place? He is here. Only when the devotee is bursting with love and devotion, Vithal will manifest Himself here (Ṣhirdi)."[64]

Dabholkar invokes the Maharashtrian tradition of reverence for *padukas*, where he records that Sai Baba would place his feet in silver sandals that devotees had made for him, or allow his footprints to be imprinted, thus blessing them as *padukas* and instructing them to be taken home and worshipped.[65] Around 1912, when many Hindu visitors from Bombay started coming to Shirdi, a devotee suggested installing a memorial to commemorate Sai Baba's advent in Shirdi, for as a young man he sat at the base of the holy *neem* tree near the *masjid*. They wanted to honour him in a traditional Maharashtrian way and it was suggested that *padukas* should be made. Silver *padukas* were finally agreed upon, and Upasani Maharaj designed them with traditional Hindu motifs, such as the lotus, conch and disc. Sai Baba accepted his Hindu devotees' spirit of devotion by agreeing to imprint his footprints on the *padukas*. To honour Sai Baba, Upasani Maharaj composed a verse in Sanskrit, which is engraved on the *paduka* memorial and translates:

> I bow to *Sadguru* Sai Nath, who by his constant presence at the foot of this *neem* tree in the past, made it superior to

> the wish-fulfilling tree, for even though its leaves were bitter, yet it exuded divine sweetness.

Here Upasani Maharaj is extolling Sai Baba by linking him with the wish-fulfilling tree of Hindu mythology.[66] The *padukas* were installed with due ceremony under the *neem* tree where they remain to this day.

Dabholkar also wanted to associate Sai Baba with all the saints who tried to unite the Hindus and Muslims. He specifically mentions the seventeenth century saint Ramdas in this context. When communal relations had deteriorated towards the end of the ninteenth century, Dabholkar asserts that Sai Baba came to bridge the Hindu-Muslim gap. He then gives Sai Baba's famous saying: "Ram [God of the Hindus] and Rahim [God of the Mahomedans] were one and the same." Dabholkar records that 'whether devotees were Hindu or Muslim, Sai Baba would treat them equally'.[67] Dabholkar writes that Sai Baba ignored caste distinctions and associated with all castes and outcastes, allowing a leper to regularly bandage his arm towards the end of his life. Dabholkar thus links Sai Baba with Chokhamela the untouchable, Rohidas the leather worker and Sajjan the butcher, all of whom were low castes or outcastes, and who are revered today as enlightened saints.[68] Sai Baba similarly made no distinction between devotees of different faiths. Dabholkar tells the story of a Ram *bhakta* who did a full prostration to Sai Baba after the saint granted a vision of himself as Lord Ram, even though the *bhakta* had previously declared that he would never fall at the feet of a Muslim. Sai Baba asked at this juncture what it mattered if a person is Muslim as long as he is enlightened. Therefore it can be concluded that Sai Baba's message, as revealed by Dabholkar's biography, was not an isolated voice in the religious history of Maharashtra. Rather it emerged as the culmination of all these numerous voices.

NOTES

1. Nizami, *Religion and Politics*, p. 204.
2. Ranade, *Mysticism in India*, p. 184.
3. Ranade, *Mysticism in India*, p. 199.
4. S.G. Tulpule, *Classical Marathi Literature*, vol IX in the series, *History of Indian Literature* (Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1979), p. 354.
5. V.S. Bendre, ed., *Yoga Samgrama* (Poona:1959).
6. Tulpule, *Classical Marathi Literature*, p. 353.
7. Dhere, *Musalman Marathi Samta Kavi*, p. 89.
8. Tulpule, p. 353.
9. *See* Wagle, "Hindu-Muslim Interactions"; Zelliot, "A Medieval Encounter between Hindu and Muslim: Eknath's Drama-Poem *Hindu Turku Samvad*" in *Images of Man: Religion and Historical Process in South Asia*, ed. Fred W. Clothey (Madras: New Era Publications).
10. Other alternative spellings include Vithala, Vitthal, Vittal, Viththal or Vitthoba. We have retained the more common spelling of '*Vitthala*' throughout this book.
11. Eleanor Zelliot, "Eknath's *Bharuds*: The Sant as link between cultures" in *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition in India*, ed. Karine Schomer and W.H. McLeod (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), p. 91.
12. Wagle, "Hindu-Muslim Interactions", p. 55.
13. Eknath, *Hindu-Turk Samvad*, vs. 50-55, 413, quoted in Wagle, "Hindu-Muslim Interactions", p. 55.
14. For an overview of the life of Tukaram, see Ranade, *Mysticism in India*, pp. 261-269.
15. Bhalchandra Nemade, *Tukaram* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1980), pp. 5-13.
16. A saint-poetess Bahinabai, a contemporary of Tukaram, wrote this *abhanga*:
    By the favour of the saints the edifice was erected.
    Jnanadeva laid the foundation and raised the temple.
    Namadeva, his servant, enlarged it to its present size.
    Ekanatha, of Janardana, gave it the support of a pillar in the form of Bhagavata.
    And Tuka became the pinnacle over which flies the banner of Bahina.
    Abhanga 143, quoted in *Santa Bahinabaici Gatha*, ed. S.A Javadekar (Poona: 1979), p. 69.
17. G.S. Ghurye, *Gods and Men* (Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1962), p. 219.
18. G.A.S.J. Deleury, *The Cult of Vithoba* (Poona: Dr. S.M. Katre for Deccan College Post Graduate and Research Institute, 1960), p. 327.
19. In the same way, 'Ram' for Kabir referred to the divine absolute, not merely to the deity named Ramachandra whose exploits are detailed in the *Ramayana*.

20. Karine Schomer and W. H. McLeod, eds., *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradion in India*. Delhi: Berkeley Religious Studies Series and Motilal Banarsidass, 1987. p. 3.
21. Quoted in *Sri Ekanathi Bhagavata* (Govt. of Maharashtra ed., Bombay: 1971), 11:1458.
22. Charlotte Vaudeville, "The Saiva-Vaisnava Synthesis in Maharashtrian Santism" in *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India*, ed. Karine Schomer and W.H. McLeod (Berkeley: Berkeley Religious Studies Series, 1987), p. 216.
23. Although this *abhanga* is found in the *Haripatha*, which is part of the *Jnanadeva Gatha* (ed. T.H. Avate, Poona: 1923), according to Vaudeville, it is probably from a period earlier than Jnanesvar. It is quoted in Tulpule, *Classical Marathi Literature*, p. 333.
24. Deleury, *Cult of Vithoba*, p. 149.
25. R.C. Dhere, *Shree Viththal: Ek Mahasamanvay* (Pune: Shreevidya Prakashan, 1984), p. 11.
26. A well-known account of a Varkari pilgrimage is called, "On the Road": A Maharashtrian Pilgrimage, by Irawati Karve. An English translation by D.D. Karve and Franklin Southworth is given in *The Experience of Hinduism: Essays on Religion in Maharashtra*, ed. Eleanor Zelliott and Maxine Berntsen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 142.
27. SSG, p. 19.
28. CS, Nos. 58-59.
29. DE, 99.
30. SS, 4:80-8.
31. LSB, I:65.
32. SSG, p. 17.
33. *Shree Guru Charitra* was written by Gangadhara Saraswati in 1538. It is written in 51 chapters and contains more than 7000 verses in *ovi* metre. The English translation is by Acharya E. Bharadwaja (Ongole, U.P.: Sai Baba Mission, 1989).
34. S.K. Phadke, *Shri Dattachintan* (Marathi), cited in Shankar Mokashi-Punekar, ed., *Avadhoota Gita*, English trans. Shree Purohit Swami (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1979), p. 35.
35. Phadke, *Shri Dattachintan*, cited in Mokashi-Punekar, *Avadhoota Gita*, p. 35.
36. Phadke, *Shri Dattachintan*, pp. 35-40.
37. A new biography entitled *Avadhuta Yogi Pant Maharaj of Balekundri*, by Indira Kher, has been published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1994.
38. Their biographies, as far as they can be compiled, have been attempted by Joshi in his 1965 doctoral thesis. Published as H.S. Joshi, *Origin and Development of Dattatreya Worship in India* (Baroda: The Maharaja

Sayajirao University of Baroda, 1965).

39. E.Bharadwaja, *The Supreme Master* (Sri Akkolkot Maharaj), (Vidyanagar, E. Bharadwaja, 1973), p. 17.
40. SSG, p. 23.
41. Bharadwaja, *The Supreme Master*, p. 21.
42. SSG, p. 28.
43. Bharadwaja, *The Supreme Master*; p. 72.
44. Bharadwaja, *The Supreme Master*, p. 51.
45. Joshi, *Dattatreya*, p. 154.
46. SS, 8:103.
47. *Sri Narayana Caritra*, pp. 53-4.
48. Meher Baba, *Sahavas: In the Company of God* (Pune: Meher Era Publications, 1977), p. 48.
49. LSB, II:51.
50. 'Adharvaneya' of the *Dattatreyopanisad*, given in the Appendix of V.B.Venkateswarulu, *Lives of Ancient Saints*, vol. 2 (Kakinada: Bulusu Venkateswarulu, 1982), p. 192.
51. CS, Nos. 21, 22.
52. CS, No. 33.
53. DE, 116.
54. CS, No. 53.
55. CS, No. 56.
56. CS, No. 58.
57. Bharadwaja, *Sai Baba the Master*, p. 113.
58. Bharadwaja, *Sai Baba the Master*, p. 130.
59. SSG, p. 274.
60. SSG, p. 114.
61. LSB, I:60.
62. SS, foreword.
63. SS, 4:33-48.
64. SSG, p. 19.
65. CS, Nos. 159-161.
66. According to Hindu mythology, when Vishnu incarnates he has at his disposal all the powers for producing anything from the wish-fulfilling tree.
67. SS, 11:2
68. SS, 12:161. This section is omitted in Gunaji's adaptation.

CHAPTER SIX

Sufi Accommodation to the Hindu Milieu

For most of Sai Baba's life, we have inferred that he must have acted as a spiritual Master or *pir* to a floating population of itinerant *Sufis* wandering around Maharashtra in the second half of the nineteenth century. But the final decade or so of his life saw the influx of many Bombay brahmans who 'discovered' him through the *kirtans* of Das Ganu or through the auspices of the eminent Nana Chandorkar, and his fame spread among the Hindu population. At this juncture, Sai Baba had to change and accommodate his Islamic language and tailor his advice to suit the understanding and sensibilities of this new Hindu 'audience'. He had to accommodate himself in two ways, for his *murids* or *Sufi* aspirants were already committed to the spiritual path with the accepted goal of God-realization. But the Hindu visitors were largely householders who were not especially spiritual, seeking rather his favours as a miracle-worker. So not only did he change his language substituting, for example, *namasmaran* for the *Sufi dhikr* - repetition of the name of God, so they could relate to his teachings, but his basic type of advice had to change. He had first to convince householders to give up destructive habits and bad tendencies such as greed, envy etc., and make them aware of the transcendental treasure he had to offer. There are precedents for this Muslim and *Sufi* accommodation to the Hindu way of thinking in Maharashtra, set by the famous *Sufi* poet-saints, and the Nizari Isma'ilis who were centred in the Bombay region. This Muslim accommodation is still continuing today in Pune in the person and writings of Shaikh Abdul Razzak Biyabani.

Sufi Poet-Saints of Maharashtra

The period between the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries witnessed a significant impact by certain *Sufi* mystics, poets and writers, upon Maharashtrian spirituality, although their contribution has hitherto been largely unrecognised outside of the region. As will be shown, Sai Baba can be seen to be the direct heir, not only to the original *Sufi* mystics in India, but also to these later poet-saints of Maharashtra. Like Sai Baba in the nineteenth century, these poets of an earlier era were *Sufi*-Muslims in a predominantly Hindu environment. Their poetry and teaching reflects both their one-pointed focus on attaining God-realization as well as their spirit of accommodation to Hindu concepts in searching for a fundamendal unity between Hindu and *Sufi*-Muslim thought. Islamic mysticism became very influential in the Deccan during these centuries due to the writings of these *Sufi* poet-mystics. They saw the similarities between the core truths of Sufism and the message of the *bhakti* poet-saints, and were concerned not only with the way to achieve God-realization, but also with attempting to convey the ineffable nature of their own experience in poetic writing. Their preoccupation was not so much to promote their own sectarian view as seeking and teaching the way to God-realization, which was the identical aim of the *bhakti* saints, a goal which transcended sectarian boundaries. As shown in the last chapter, the mystic goal of God-realization was to be found in the poetic out-pourings of the *bhakti* saints, Jnanesvar, Namdev, Eknath and Tukaram, and, to varying degrees, all of them, with the exception of Jnanesvar, were influenced by key tenets of both Islam and Sufism, which were 'in the air' prior to this period. Sai Baba would teach Muslims and *Sufis* such as Abdul by using the *Qur'an*, as evidenced by the *Saibaba MS*, but for his new Hindu devotees he would recommend *Eknathi Bhagavatha, Jnanesvari* or the *Bhagavad-Gita*. When speaking to them of God, he would use the name *Hari* or Ram instead of *Allah*, for his favourite teaching was that whatever name was used to call upon God, all reached the same essential Divinity. He even allowed a little Hindu ritual such as *arati* to be performed to him, and acceded in innumerable small ways to their love, to accommodate his message for his Hindu devotees during this period. Like the Sufi-poets before him he wanted to promote the essential unity of *Sufi-bhakti* concepts.

The *Sufi* poet-mystics, according to Tulpule, 'were not religious propagandists or proselytisers. Actually they belonged to the cult of *Sufis* which was close to devotional Hinduism and were trying to merge and integrate *Sufi* concepts with those of the *bhakti* cult as propounded by the Marathi poet-saints.'[1] Their poetic efforts form a substantial corpus within Marathi literature, and were popular in their time, although both Western and Maharashtrian scholars have consistently overlooked this indigenous *Sufi* contribution to the Marathi literature on mysticism and God-realization. V.S. Bendre, and especially R.C. Dhere, both writing exclusively in Marathi, are among the few scholars in Maharashtra to have attempted an analysis of this Muslim contribution to the medieval Marathi literature.

The three most notable of these poet-mystics were Shah Muntoji Bahamani (1575-1650)[2], Shekh Mahammad (1560-1650)[3], and Shah Muni (1756-1807).[4] Two of their works, written in Marathi, stand out as being very influential, the *Yogasamgrama* composed in 1645 by Shekh Mahammad, a *Sufi* of the Qadiriyya Order, and the *Siddhanta Bodha*, composed in 1795 by Shah Muni. These works have not previously been translated into English. While the Hindu poet-saints who wrote in Marathi in the medieval period belonged to the mainstream Indian tradition, the *Sufi* poet-saints belonged to a different religious tradition rooted in the Middle East. The essential difference between the Islamic and the Hindu traditions still remained - Islam unequivocally insisted upon the unity of the Godhead where God remains indistinct and formless, thereby rejecting image worship and the concurrent understanding of God with attributes. Notwithstanding these factors, the *Sufi* poet-saints did attempt to work within the Indian milieu and, in the process, adopted some of the symbols, imagery and ideology of the Maharashtrian Hindu tradition, sometimes called the Maharashtrian *dharma*.

Shekh Mahammad used Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit and Marathi terms interchangeably, such as *haqiqat* (the Truth) *mar'ifat* (divine insight), *brahmananda* (bliss of Brahma) and *brahmavilasa* to describe the direct experience of God-realization. All denote similar concepts. He was concerned with teaching the steps of the *Sufi tariqat* in terms acceptable to a Hindu *bhakta*, as well as with conveying the essential feeling and experience of a *Sufi*. In order to convey his mystical experience, Shekh Mahammad would often employ technical Sanskrit/ Marathi terminology, such as *antahkarana* instead of the Persian term *dil* for heart in his work the *Yogasamgrama*.[5] Similarly, Hussen Ambarkhan, born in 1603, was the first Muslim author to write a Marathi commentary or *tika* on the *Bhagavad-Gita*, which he published in 1647 as *Gitabhavarthadipika*.[6] At this level of religious consciousness sectarian boundaries are blurred, and as Wagle avers 'in the world of *sadhus* and *sants*, symbiosis was a working proposition'.[7]

The *Sufi* poet-saints strove to promote a spirit of accommodation of Islam within the larger Hindu Maharashtrian religious community, and in the same vein Sai Baba can be viewed as a *Sufi*-Muslim mystic who essentially accepted Hindu symbols and ideology within his all-embracing belief in one God. No Hindu deity was ever worshipped in Sai Baba's *masjid*, but for Hindu followers he would recommend the reading of Hindu scripture, and would endorse the worship of a family's *ishtadevata* or chosen deity. Tulpule describes the Maharashtrian ethos as 'spiritual unity amidst religious diversity', which seems to sum up the attitude of the *Sufi* poet-saints, and is a theme which was embraced by Sai Baba and constantly emphasized by him.[8]

Shah Muntoji Bahamani

The sixteenth-century Shah Muntoji Bahamani (1575-1650) was the earliest of the *Sufi* poet-mystics to be acknowledged by Mahipati, the eighteenth-century Marathi biographer of the poet-saints of Maharashtra.[9] In his unpublished work *Pancikarana*, Shah Muntoji sought to establish that the underlying core beliefs of Hinduism and Islam are identical, albeit couched in different language. Dhere states that Shah Muntoji's work is an attempt to prove that Hindu and *Sufi* principles and thought are the same.[10]

The *Pancikarana*, written in Marathi, is basically a dictionary which gives the Marathi and Persian/Dakkhani/Urdu equivalents of significant religious and philosophical terms and concepts to support his argument that the religious truths are essentially the same in Hinduism and Islam. By equating, for instance, the Hindu invocation to God Rama with the Muslim *Bismilla* or profession of faith, Shah Muntoji, as a Muslim, was clearly seeking to accommodate Hindu religious symbols.[11] Shah Muntoji writes: 'Understand the import of the *Pancikarana* that unites Muslims and Hindus'.[12]

Mahipati wrote 100 verses in his *Bhaktavijaya* about Shah Muntoji whom he calls Sant Bahamani. According to hagiographical accounts, Shah Muntoji was spiritually awakened while sitting one day with his consort in an open window, eating plantains, and throwing the peels down to the courtyard below. A beggar, finding the peels, started licking them, and on being discovered was thrashed for entering the courtyard. The beggar began laughing, which enraged Muntoji, who ordered the beggar to explain himself. If, said the beggar, for only eating the peels of plantains he was so severely punished, what dire punishment would await Muntoji for eating the whole fruit, and if he was thrashed for merely entering the courtyard, what would happen to Muntoji who lived there every day.[13] These remarks had a profound effect upon him, and Muntoji immediately began a spiritual quest, discussing God with Hindu *pandits* and Muslim theologians.(*mullas*). *Mullas* advised him: 'Do prayers and fasting, only then will you reach God (*khuda*)'.[14] The *pandits* advised him: 'Our all-pervading God (*khuda*) resides in Pandharpur'[15], meaning one must go there on pilgrimage and pray to the deity Vitthala for God-realization. He realized that he essence of these instructions is the same, namely that it is through prayer that one attains God-realization.

Shah Muntoji went in search of a teacher and found a Hindu *guru* named Sahajananda. It was Sahajananda who bestowed upon Shah Muntoji the lofty title *Mrtyunjaya* meaning conqueror of death, and asked him to live in Narayanapur near Kalyani.

According to the *Purnananda Carita*, Sahajananda, impressed by his Brahman-like intelligence, became determined to accept Muntoji as Hindu with a Brahmin status. The hagiographical account further narrates how a Brahmin assembly, unwilling to accept a *Sufi* as one of their own, recommended that he be tested by being put into the fire thrice. If he were to emerge unscathed, they would then accept him as Brahmin. Muntoji emerged safely from this fire ordeal, but the Brahmins then explained this away by saying that Muntoji was not a human being, but a deity of some sort, hence could not be a Brahmin.[16] After his encounter with the *guru*, Muntoji received the bliss of God-realization. The *guru* then realized that Muntoji was more spiritually advanced than a Brahmin - even though a *Sufi*. His biographer Mahipati writes in his *Bhaktivijaya* that when a Lingayat priest called Bhavaraya became Shah Muntoji's disciple, the other Lingayats admonished him saying, *Mrtyunjaya* was a Muslim with little wisdom.[17] After severely criticising Bhavaraya, his fellow Lingayats cast him out from their community. Bhavaraya then went to Muntoji who merely told him: 'Have trust in yourself, and constantly sing the praise of God.'[18] This story demonstrates the intense empathy between Hindu *gurus* and Muslim *Sufis* at the spiritual level while sectarian differences persisted at the worldly level. Thus through a Hindu *guru* Muntoji experienced God, and as a Muslim he taught his Hindu disciple to engage in constant prayer to God. Great *Sufi* saints are venerated after their demise by supplicants who visit their *dargahs* out of respect and to request boons. Shah Muntoji's *dargah* at Narayanpur is referred to as that of *Murtaja Qadiri*, because Muntoji was known to belong to the Qadiriyya *Sufi* Order.[19] His *urs* is still celebrated there every year and is well-attended by Hindus as well as Muslims.

Sai Baba also made an effort to show the essential unity of Hindu and Islamic terms and concepts. His biographers relate how he would use *bhakti* and *Sufi* terms interchangeably, such as *guru/pir* (master), *sadhana/tariqa* (practices on the spiritual path), and *saksatkara/baraka* (blessing, spiritual power). Chinna Kistna said of Sai Baba that he was always impartial and his advice was, "If you are a Rama *bhakta* keep to Rama. If you want only *Allah*, keep to *Allah*."[20] Sai Baba, like Shah Muntoji, told devotees to constantly sing the praises of God. *Bhajans* were performed in and around his *masjid*, and also devotional songs, referred to as *qawwalis*, were sung in the company of *Sufis*. Narasimhaswami records that, 'people were doing *moula* every day during day time before Baba at the *mosque* and *kowali* [*qawwali*] with tabla and sarangi.'[21] When Sai Baba knew he was about to die, he sent a messenger to the *Sufis* in Aurangabad with money to pay for *qawwalis* to be sung on his behalf. On the other hand, Sai Baba encouraged Das Ganu to become a *kirtankar*, a singer who extols the Hindu gods and saints through devotional songs.

Shekh Mahammad

Many notable seventeenth and eighteenth century Hindus of Maharashtra admired Shekh Mahammad, 1560-1650 of Srigonde (District Ahmednagar) for his spiritual greatness and the quality of his poetry. Like Muntoji, his religious background is interesting in its implications, for in Maharashtra (as also in other parts of India) it was possible for a Muslim to have a Hindu *guru* while remaining Muslim, and vice-versa.[22] In fact Dhere notes that Shekh Mahammad also had several Hindu disciples, notably one Mudha Pangula. Pangula used to go on begging rounds in the morning and used to shout the slogan: '*Dharma jago Mahamadaca*!' - 'Let the *dharma* as preached by Shekh Mahammad, live!'.[23] It was possible therefore, in this atmosphere, for a Brahmin to accept a Muslim disciple, and vice-versa, a Muslim or *Sufi pir* could accept Hindu *celas* or students, without any formal conversion. Wagle avers that Shekh Mahammad's Muslim identity is beyond question, his *guru* being Chand Bodhale who belonged to the *Sufi* Qadiriyya Order and who was a disciple of the Shekh's father, a Qadiri *Sufi* named Raje Mahammad. Shekh Mahammad's father Raje Mahammad is known to have been a *murid* of Gausa who died in Gwalior in 1517.[24] As previously mentioned, Chand Bodhale was also the *guru* of Janardhan Swami, the preceptor of the *bhakti*-poet saint, Eknath.[25] According to a local legend, Chand Bodhale gave Shekh

Mahammad a copy of the *Jnanesvari* on the banks of the Godavari river.[26]

Shekh Mahammad was very familiar with the Hindu gods and Hindu texts, while still retaining his Muslim heritage. He is regarded by the Hindus of Maharashtra as an *avatar* of Kabir.[27] Kabir himself was thought to be a low caste Hindu convert to Islam, or the son of a Muslim convert, and he adhered strongly to the notion of one formless God. Shekh Mahammad's syncretic ideas and convictions regarding God and God-realization are clear from several of his passages in his major work *Yogasamgrama* written in 1645. According to Shekh Mahammad, God is one and is above sectarian and religious squabblings. In Chapter 17 he argues that the problem is largely one of language.

> Salute to Sri Ganesa. *Allah* is great and the only one. He is loved, constantly praised by men. He is God, Rahimana, who envelops the universe. He is the real One; with a thousand names he pervades the universe. Realise this, and give up clamouring [about the duality of God], serve the real *Guru*. Muslims call him the real *pir* and the Marathas call him *sadguru*, the enlightened *guru*. Open your eyes brother, the two are the same. In fifty-two languages they start bickering about *Allah* who is one. In their tongues they quarrel, arguing with each other. Recognize the belief in duality [of God] as the sign of heresy. They lose sight of God in their quarrel. The self knowing one will profit himself with the blessing of the *pir*. The Persian asks for *ab* (water), the Maratha asks for *pani* (water), without knowing that the meaning of the words is the same. Due to ignorance, their misunderstanding [of the meaning of the word] leads to a quarrel. The thirsty Kannada [a person who speaks Kannada language] asks for *nirkuda* (water), the Musalman said, 'What is he babbling about'? The interpreter *(dubhasi)* [lit. bilingual person] silenced them both by giving them *nira* (water). Thus the key was used to unlock [the true] meaning [of God] in fifty-two

> tongues. Once they realized this [key to] knowledge, the fallacy dissipated. They understood the oneness of God.[28]

Thus Shekh Mahammad identifies the key problems separating Hindus and Muslims as one of semantics and external cultural differences, which cause friction between the Hindu and Muslim communities. The Shekh amusingly comments at another place in the *Yogasamgrama*, that if there had been two gods, *Hari* of the Hindus and *Allah* of the Muslims, they would have perished fighting each other.[29] But, he affirms, they are not two separate gods, they are essentially one and the same.

The affinity between saints irrespective of religious affiliation is apparent in Mahipati's hagiography of Shekh Mahammad, where he relates a story illustrating the *karamat* (miracle) power of the Shekh, and his mystical connection to the *bhakti* poet Tukaram:

> Shekh Mahammad was performing a *kirtan* with great delight for his love of God's name. He was an ocean of knowledge. Men of all the eighteen castes great and small sat there to listen.... Just then the performer jumped and rubbed the canopy with his hands. All wondered at this strange sight. Then those who sat in front asked, 'Why did you rub the canopy, O Swami? Seeing this strange action, our mind is confused.' Then Shekh Mahammad explained: At Dehu the Vaisnava Tuka is performing a *kirtan* in love. No one noticed that the burning torch had touched the canopy. I saw it on fire, and I extinguished it from here. On hearing this the listeners felt dubious. No one could believe it.... Shekh Mahammad said if you do not believe what I say, then send someone to Dehu to bring the news. Then they wrote a letter to the *Patil* (village officer) of Dehu and sent it by a camel-rider.... At sunset the reply came, 'At night as the *kirtan* was going on with full din, the torch touched the canopy and set it on fire. It made a very large hole in it, but no one knew of it that night. In the morning it was noticed. This made all wonder'.[30]

Except for Mahipati's reference, there is no historical evidence that proves Shekh Mahammad's connection with Tukaram. However, the story (which may well be true) is interesting in that it establishes a connection between a Muslim *Sufi* and a Hindu *bhakta*, who are seen as being on the same spiritual 'wavelength'.

Shekh Mahammad used to be called 'the teacher of *brahmavidya*' and Dhere convincingly equates this teaching with the *Sufi tariqat*, the structured steps leading to God-realization.[31] In the *Yogasamgrama* the warrior engaged in the battle is the *atma* (soul). This warrior mounting his horse (mind) starts the battle with *ahamkara* (ego) to conquer it. Conceit raised his army composed of passion, anger and lethargy. The *atma* then defeating the army of *ahamkara*, reaches the pinnacle of *brahmananda*, the essence of Brahma.

The prefatory remarks opening each chapter of the *Yogasamgrama* clearly reveal the obvious accommodative impulse in Shekh Mahammad's writings. All his eighteen chapters start with an invocation to Sri Ganesa, the traditional Hindu-Maharashtrian mode of beginning a chapter or a book - using *Om* at the start of each chapter, for example: *Om*, I salute Sri Ganesa, I salute the unmanifest (*avyakta*) God (*Ram*). I bow to God Narayana who is called *Allah*.[32] These prefatory 'benedictory' verses, at the beginning of each chapter of the *Yogasamgrama*, demonstrate that Shekh Mahammad, although Muslim, was accommodating Hindu religious symbols and was not constrained by Islamic religious boundaries in expressing his mystic ideas. Nevertheless, Shekh Mahammad's Islamic predilection for one God surfaces in his criticism of the Hindu multiplicity of gods and goddesses, with each god or goddess having their special day of the week for worship. He complains that the people do not hold fast to one sacred object, for each day of the week they have a different God:

> In one instance they loudly utter '*dom dom*' (the Muslim greeting). In another instance they will shout '*elkot malhari*' in praise of the god Khandoba of Jejuri. On Friday they worship the goddess Candesvari.[33]

Shekh Mahammad also ridicules pilgrimages to holy places as a means to God-realization without first having purified the heart. He has praised the God Vitthala of Pandharpur, while not necessarily endorsing pilgrimage per se. As a Muslim how can he praise the image of Vitthala in Pandharpur? This is an apparent contradiction of Muslim belief. But Shekh Mahammad has praised many of the Hindu Gods - Ganesa, Ram and Krishna, for him these are merely names of God. Hari, for Shekh Mahammad, actually stands for *Allah.* Shekh Mahammad appears to view God not as an image, but as a formless abstract. Clearly he is trying to reconcile the Islamic understanding of God, as an attributeless and formless entity, with the Hindu understanding of manifest gods. He knows this essential difference between the two religions, and is trying to promulgate his belief in one God through the belief system of the Hindus.

While Shekh Mahammad introduced his Hindu learning into his discourses, uniting Hindu ideas with *Sufi* ones, he endeavoured to teach people to reach God-realization through an ethical *Sufi tariqat*. One of the important ways he recommended was the constant remembrance of God's name, termed *zikr* in Urdu, and usually spelt *dhikr* in its Indian transliteration, and spelt thus hereafter in this book. He says:

> One should constantly remember and internalize God's name; on death-bed, while striking someone, while in enjoyment of sexual pleasures, while sitting, eating, sleeping, while fully asleep, while talking, walking, crying, laughing, the mind is preoccupied with God's name. Sekh Mahamad *[sic]* is a simpleton. He prefers to work with God's name and has set afire the ways [of salvation] involving the rituals of purity and pollution [in order to achieve salvation].

Thus, Shekh Mahammad, in keeping with his critique of ritualism emphasised the value of reciting and remembering God's name, which is a fundamental precept of orthodox Islam, Sufism and *bhakti* Hinduism.

Shekh Mahammad, by accommodating to the host country's religion, and tolerating it, establishes a linkage between Hinduism and Islam. Shekh Mahammad's adherence to Islam is unshakeable, as evidenced by the fact that there is not a single verse in his prolific writings which debunks Islam. In accordance with his penchant to accept first the Hindu religious environment, then overlay it with new meaning which would fit in with basic Islamic beliefs, he said: 'Recognize the essence of Brahma. Recognize this as *Allah*, nothing but Godhead.'[34] Shekh Mahammad's own missionary impulse as a *Sufi* was strong, and the work of Hindu accommodation was thus skilfully worked out by him. Elsewhere he says: 'The One who has no form and has no visible personality is my companion'.[35] To reiterate, Shekh Mahammad accepted the various Hindu gods in different forms and used Hindu mythology and religious imagery, and overlaid it with the *Sufi* ideal of one God. In the *Yogasamgrama*, Shekh Mahammad describes the characteristics of a true *Sufi*.

> The true living *Sufi* is the one who has eliminated anger and lust. Constantly he remembers *Allah* even while breathing in and out. He avoids useless talk and he enjoys happiness in solitude. He does not show pride in his *Sufi* achievement of extinguishing thirty-six stages [of obstacles on the path of realizing God], by his own effort. He is entranced with love [of God] and he has lost his consciousness in meditation.[36]

Sai Baba and Shekh Mahammad were both Muslims in a largely Hindu milieu. Both apparently chose to accommodate the Maharashtrian Hindu *dharma*, while maintaining their Muslim identity. Like Shekh Mahammad, Sai Baba's behaviour towards all religions was noble, and according to his Muslim devotee Abdulla Jan, 'he would never decry or depreciate any religion or person belonging to any caste, groups or position.'[37] Sai Baba's Hindu devotees introduced Hindu motifs and ritual into the worship of Sai Baba which he accepted in a spirit of accommodation. For example, he accepted *arati* performed to him on his route to the *chavadi*, and blessed *padukas*. He also named his *masjid* '*Dwarakamayi*' indicating a refuge like a mother's protection.[38] The literal translation is 'mother Dwaraka', a name associated with Krishna, although no Hindu deity was ever worshipped there (*see* Plate 21 of the entrance to the masjid with '*Dwarakamayi*' written above the entrance in Marathi *devanagari* script). Another example is the annual *urs* festival, which for thirteen years was a distinctively Muslim festival, which was later allowed by Sai Baba to be incorporated with celebrations for *Ramnavami* in order to please his Hindu devotees. His spirit of accommodation is well summed up in the incident in which Sai Baba tried to placate his Muslim followers who were upset upon seeing a Hindu devotee smearing sandal-paste on the forehead of Sai Baba in the manner of the Vaisnavas. Allowing him to do this, Sai Baba said, "*taisa desa taisa vesa*" which means essentially that when one is in a different country one should adopt the local customs.[39]

As was demonstrated by Shekh Mahammad with Tukaram, Sai Baba had the ability to telepathically communicate with other saints. This was demonstrated, for example,when he announced in Shirdi the exact moment of the demise of his contemporary, Gajanan Maharaj of Shregaon, the time later being confirmed by mail.[40] Sai Baba, like Shekh Mahammad, said that making a trip to holy places under the guise of pilgrimage was futile so long as one did not purify one's heart. Sai Baba also mirrored Shekh Mahammad's insistence on the value of reciting the name of God in order to steady the mind and purify the heart. Not only did he frequently recommend *dhikr* for his devotees, he was also seen and heard constantly repeating the name of *Allah*. Purandhare records that, 'he would stand in front of his *dhuni* and repeat the words *Yade Haqq, Allah Malik* or *Allah Vali Hai*, often and at all times'.[41] There is even a story told by his close devotee, Mhalsapati, attesting to Sai Baba's constant adherence to the name of God, in which he asked Mhalsapati to place his hand on his chest while he slept, so that Mhalsapati could wake him up if for an instant he ceased to repeat the name.[42] Sai Baba, like Shekh Mahammad, believed that repetition of the names of God included the names of Hindu gods, which he equated with *Allah*, and would say on occasion words to the effect: 'All that (viz., all other Gods) is *Allah*.'[43] Thus, Hindu devotees were told to repeat the name Rama or Hari etc., according to their preference.[44]

Shah Muni

Another voice for Hindu-Muslim rapprochement was the *Sufi* poet-saint Shah Muni. Shah Muni was acutely aware of his own Muslim identity in an all too Hindu environment. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Hindu Maratha rule of the Brahmin Peshawas became firmly established in Maharashtra, replacing the Muslim rule of the previous three centuries. Thus the religio-political pendulum had swung the other way since Shekh Mahammad's time. Shah Muni is apologetic about his birth and the differences between the two communities.[45]

> I do not belong to the *brahmana jati*, nor am I a *ksatriya*, or *vaisya*....I was born as a Muslim who is [regarded] as lower than the low *sudra* class, whose rituals and ways are opposite and who say that the Maharashtra *dharma* is false. They [the Muslims] have destroyed the Siva temples and have broken down the images of gods. They are the haters of the gods and are prone to violence. On their festival day they delight in sacrificing cows. With arrogance they ridicule the *Vedas* and *Puranas*. In the pit of the Muslims I was born. But I am now engaged in the love of Sri Krishna. I have taken refuge in the saints and I beg for your acceptance.[46]

Shah Muni had an interesting lineage and attributes his interest in God and spirituality to his great-grandfather. He tells us, 'I was named Sahababa after my great-grandfather (the term *baba* was used as an affix for the *Sufis* even at this time). Due to the strength of the seed of *bhakti* present in my great-grandfather, it sprouted in me and I surrendered myself at the feet of the *saints*'. A significant point in Shah Muni's genealogy is that for four generations his ancestors were itinerant *Sufis* always on the move, and that they had to recognise and come to terms with the local deities of the regions in which they travelled. Shah Muni informs us that his *guru* was Munindra Swami, a follower of the deity Dattatreya who familiarized Shah Muni with this tradition, and was instrumental in helping him attain the experience of God-realization. He took the name Shah Muni in honour of his *guru* Munindra Swami.[47] Hindu-Muslim symbiosis was evidently at work in the form of Dattatreya worship at this time. Thus, Shah Muni sought to situate the Muslims in the spiritual history of Maharashtra, in order to legitimize Muslims in the overall scheme of things. This is the underlying message throughout Shah Muni's major work *Siddhanta Bodha*, completed in 1795. The *Siddhanta Bodha* is recited during the monsoon months by his devotees throughout the state of Maharashtra, although its popularity has not extended much beyond the borders of the state, due to lack of translation.[48]

Shah Muni familiarized himself in the Hindu religious books and became well-versed in the *Vedas*, *Puranas* and *Dharmasastras*, but he never abandoned his Muslim allegiance. He recognised the rift between the ideas and practices of the Muslims (*avindhas*) and the *dharma* of the Hindus, commenting:

> Some say that the ways of both are identical. Isvara and *Allah* are one and the same. But due to ignorance they (Hindus and Muslims) do not understand the meaning [of this statement].[49]

Employing the *Puranic* mythical style of writing, he explains the origin of Islam and how the *Qur'an* came into being, and how Muslims came to call Narayana, the great *Allah*. The Prophet Muhammad, whom he terms *Paighambar*, was created by Mahavishnu in order to spread Islam:

> Mahavisnu, the Isvara, is the supreme ruler of the world. His rule stretches from this land (*karmabhumi*, India) to the milky primeval ocean of Mahavisnu who rests on the eternal serpent. Mahavisnu created *Paighambar* who descended to earth. From *Paighambar*, we find the spreading of Muslims (*yavanas)* throughout the world.

> Out of the millions of gods (*daivas*) a select 80 thousand became wise *Paighambars* and established Islam (*mlecca dharma*). That sustainer of the world Narayana created the four *sastras* which the Muslims (*yavanas)* call the *Qur'an*. The Muslims (*yavanas*) read the *Qur'an* which is the word of God (Narayana)....The Muslims (*yavanas)* call Narayana the great *Allah*.[50]

By placing the Prophet Mohammed and the *Qur'an* within the traditional Hindu context, Shah Muni was attempting to forge a common bond between Hindus and Muslims for the sake of peaceful communal co-existence. He continues this theme, attempting to explain the origin of Muslims in Maharashtra and to account for the apparent rift between Muslims and Hindus, employing mythogical images blaming the age-old rivalry between the followers of Shiva and Vishnu:

> Mahavisnu explained the division of the *varnas* to God Brahma. I have told you the ways of the *yavanas* before. I shall now add to it. Dilva was a great sage (*rsi*). Muslims (*yavanas)* called him Adam. Dilva worshipped Mahavisnu and hated Siva. Karfava worshipped Siva constantly and ridiculed Mahavisnu. Their enmity grew day by day, Karfava built a Siva temple and propitiated [the image] with regular rituals. Dilva built a mosque (*masjid*) and started praying to it. One day Karfava's cow, entering Dilva's abode, stood in the mosque. Dilva said to himself, 'this cow is standing in the centre of my house of worship.' With anger, he ran to beat her with a stick. The cow counter-attacked and gored him to death with her horns. The hot-headed son, Musal, became extremely furious and with a weapon killed the cow and avenged his father's death by eating her flesh. The sons born in his lineage became like him and started killing cows and eating them. Dilva's house is called *din* [the Muslim religion], and Musal's descendants are known as Musalmans. The enmity against Karfava was maintained [in Musal's lineage], hence Maharashtra is called Kafar

> (infidel). They [Muslims], therefore, break images and Siva temples and hate the gods. This is the origin of the Muslim caste (*yavana jati*).[51]

Shah Muni's stance of abject humiliation and modesty was a device to accommodate himself in a largely Hindu milieu. Employing such a strategy, he is in the tradition of Shekh Mahammad, but the latter essentially wrote in the era when Muslim power was still politically dominant in Maharashtra (late sixteenth-early seventeenth century). Then, Nizam Shahi and Adil Shahi were in control of the land, and the Mughals had started a campaign to conquer Maharashtra. By Shah Muni's time the political situation had changed dramatically. Not only were Hindus the numerically dominant segment of the population but the entire land was now under Hindu political domination. Shah Muni's remarks have to be understood in the context of this political reality.

In keeping with the *Sufi* premise, Shah Muni, like Shekh Mahammad, was a believer in God as unmanifest, invisible and formless *(avyakta, alaksa* and *nirakari*). Throughout the first 16 chapters of his book he regards the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesvara as inferior to Paramesvara (God). His emphasis was on *advaita* understood in the context of one-ness with God (monism or pantheism), as used by the poet-saints. In effect the essential message of Shah Muni's *Siddhanta Bodha* is the triumph of the principle of oneness of God over the belief in the duality of existence. He writes:

> The gist of this work [*Siddhanta Bodha*] and my contention is to understand the end of meditation: to be content with the principle of non-duality, and to be content with the realization 'I am Brahma'. One should enjoy the one-ness in the blissful state of meditation and one should be engrossed in that state of mind. This is the gist of the *Bhagavad-Gita* told by the Lord and is also the essence of the *vedas*. Like a snake who travels in a zigzag way but ultimately reaches his abode, similarly the poets wrote in a variety of ways, but in the end they came to

> understand the reality of one-ness. I have also in my work *Siddhanta Bodha*, written a variety of views on duality. Eventually the realization of one-ness has won. The total writing proves one-ness of God.[52]

Shah Muni avers that God-realization was not limited by Hindu-Muslim boundaries. Shah Muni describes his personal experience of *brahmavilasa* (the state of joy in God-realization).

> Munindra Swami on the banks of the Ganges at Banares, did not consider my origin, but openly instructed me in true realization. I was able to unravel the mysteries and I was able to shed the veil of ignorance. He uttered in my ears the mantra and my whole heart enlightened. The foggy state of my illusory world disappeared, and my heart glowed with the light. I realized that I am Brahma...[My *guru's*] instruction guided me to the experience of *brahmavilasa*. I lost my self-awareness (my me-ness). I could not distinguish between name and form....[53]

Shah Muni concludes, 'the concept of name and form is illusory, needed to know the world around you, but know that *atma* (God) is the reality. A being who has freed himself, sees the entire universe pervaded by God. Those who are believers in duality of existence can only comprehend the duality'.[54]

In contrast to these *Sufi-poets*, Sai Baba was not obliged to conciliate either the Hindu or Muslim authorities since Shirdi lay within the British Protectorate of the Bombay Presidency. Thus he was able to operate in his own idiosyncratic way, without fear of criticism or interference from any religious authorities. Sai Baba, in the tradition of Shah Muni, recognized Hindus and Muslims as both sons of the same soil and sought to show that their sectarian differences were irrelevant at the spiritual level. His ideas of the oneness of God and his innumerable manifestations clearly resonate with Shah Muni's ideas in the *Siddhanta Bodha*. The translation of the Marathi writings of these *Sufi* poet-saints throws new light on the teachings of Sai Baba as being the culmination and re-emphasis of their efforts to see the essential unity of the Muslim concept of God, *Allah*, with the one Divinity underlying all the Names and Forms of the Hindu pantheon. Sai Baba, like Shekh Mahammad and Shah Muni, reached the goal of experiencing God directly and, after his enlightenment experience in 1886, expressed at various times the essential oneness of all manifestations of God by declaring his identity with the various manifestations, and even granting visions of himself as the various deities. On occasion he would say, "I am *Allah*", but at other times he would identify his innate Divinity with Ganesha saying, "All the offerings you have made to Ganapati have reached me." Similar statments could be cited regarding Mahalakshmi, Vitthala, Ram, Goddess Ganga, etc. On one occasion with Nana Chandorkar, Sai Baba discoursed on the way to experience God-realization, and speaks authoritatively from the perspective of one who has attained it. *Sufis* who have attained God-realization are said to be 'Perfect'. Sai Baba said:

> These, when 'perfect' are called *siddhas*. At that stage, God becomes the same as man; praise the same as blame etc. They have no desires. They are past the notion that the body is their home or their self. They feel their self to be identical with God. "I am Brahman" is their feeling. To know God, see how God is viewed by each of these, at each stage. Then ultimately God is seen as manifested in all forms - moveable and immoveable. God is everywhere. There is no place from which he is absent. But behold the power of *maya* that does not allow Eswara to be seen and recognised. I, you and all the the world are *Amsa*, i.e. parts of the Lord. Therefore let none hate another. Forget not that God is in every place.[55]

The Nizari Isma'ili Islamic Sect

An Islamic sect noted for its reaching out to the Hindu majority in India, is the Nizari Isma'ili branch, centred in the Bombay region of Maharashtra. The origin of the *Isma'ili* sect is an interesting one, for while they revere the Prophet Mohammad, it is to 'Ali that they attribute their origin. 'Ali is regarded as the *Mahdi* or

Guided One who is yet to come to save mankind, and in the *Isma'ili* tradition he is equated with the tenth *avatar* incarnation of Visnu in the Hindu scheme of the *dasavataras* - traditional ten incarnations. Both *Sunnis* and *Shi'is* revere 'Ali's two sons Hasan and Husain as the successors to the *Imamate* through divine guidance (*nass*). After the deaths of Hasan and Husain, the *Sunni* and *Shi'i* split. The *Sunnis* followed the Umayyad leader, Mu'awiya, while the *Shi'is* and *Isma'ilis* both accepted 'Ali ibn Husain as the fourth *Imam*, and his son Muhammad al-Baqir as the fifth *Imam*. Both again accepted his son Ja'far as-Sadiq, as the sixth *Imam*. But here the *Shi'is* and the *Isma'ilis* split again, for the *Shi'a* accepted Ja'far's second son, Musa al-Kasim, as the seventh *Imam* and follow his line of descent up to the twelfth *Imam* whom they revere as the *Mahdi* and whom they believe will return one day. The *Isma'ilis* however, accept Ja'far's first son, Isma'il, as the true *Imam*, even though he is said to have predeceased his father, hence the derivation of their name *Isma'ilis*.

The *Isma'ilis* are also known by the term *Batiniyya* because of their belief that there is a hidden esoteric meaning behind every literal or external utterance of revealed scripture. The title of *Batiniyya* was given to the *Isma'ilis* during the medieval period because of this belief. This type of scriptural interpretation was known as *Batini ta'wil*, which was full of symbolism and allegory. Mankind was divided into the elite who knew the *ta'wil* and the rest who did not. 'Ali was exalted, sometimes above Mohammad, in revealing this secret esoteric knowledge. The main branches of *Isma'ilis* were the Fatimids in Egypt and the Nizaris in Iran. The Nizaris came to India, and in the fifteenth century splintered into two groups - the Sulaymanis, followers of Sulayman 'Ali; and the Da'udis, the followers of Dawud Qutb Shah. Today the Sulaymanis are only a small group in India, the majority having migrated to the Yemen. The Da'udis make up the majority of *Isma'ilis* in India today, centred in Gujarat and Maharashtra, particularly around Mumbai.

One of the most surprising findings of the *Saibaba MS* has been to find references to ideas and beliefs of the Nizari *Isma'ilis*, particularly as this Islamic sect was centred in the Bombay Presidency in the nineteenth century. So, it is interesting to speculate that, as they were so close, Sai Baba may have been in contact with these ideas through the oral tradition of Maharashtra. Listed on various pages of the *Saibaba MS* are the five names, Mohammad, Fatima, ʻAli, Hasan and Husain, which may be taken literally as a list of the Prophet's family. In the *Isma'ili* tradition, however, there exists the doctrine of *panj tan-i-pak* or the Five Companions of the Mantle. This pentad consists of the same five individuals, whom the *Isma'ili* perceive to be an earthly epiphany of the Divine Being.[56] We can only speculate that Sai Baba may have been referring to this *Isma'ili* doctrine when he was discoursing with Abdul on the occasion when he noted the five names. There are numerous references to ʻAli throughout the *Saibaba MS*, and to Sulayman and Daud on page 137 [K1], which also suggests a familiarity with the *Isma'ili* history in India.

The *Isma'ili* sect spread their message with missionary zeal in India, using the medium of the local Hindu culture. Inevitably some Hindu ideas were incorporated into *Isma'ili* cosmology, and they grew to recognize a parallelism between various concepts within the two traditions. For example, ʻAli is proclaimed to be the future saviour, or *Mahdi*, a concept which is identical with the tenth *avatar* of Visnu, who, it is said, will incarnate at the end of the *Kaliyuga*, the present Hindu age, in order to save mankind. Similarly, it is prophesied in the *Puranas* that Kalki, the tenth *avatar*, will come in the future to re-establish righteousness and usher in a new golden age. The *Saibaba MS* lists ʻAli, Hasan and Husayn, and implies by the expression on page 134 [K4], ʻ*Awwal Mahdi Aakir Mahdi*' that ʻAli was the first *Mahdi* or Guided One, and he will be the last, appearing at the end of the world to save mankind.

This concept of divine descent which is a vital precept within the *Isma'ili* sect, is not present in orthodox Islam. This *avataric* status was repeatedly attributed to Sai Baba, a fact which has been used by his Hindu devotees to 'prove' that Sai Baba must be Hindu.[57] The statement on page 49 [K89] of the *Saibaba MS* has a distinctively Ismaʻili flavour:

> There are thousands of *avatars* in the *Kaliyuga*. The methods of worship for everyone are different. The present *Kaliyuga avatar* is Sai Baba. In this world there are always 10-20 *avatars* of similar kind living at the same time.

Some of the cosmological lists of names of past *avatars* and *rsis* or sages given to Abdul by Sai Baba, are listed on pages 41 [K97] to 46 [K92] of the *Saibaba MS*. Narasimhaswami, interviewing Abdul in the 1930's, also got this list from him which he published in *Sri Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings*, No 147, but among the traditional ten names of *avatars* there are many other names of sages or *avatars* which have not yet been deciphered, and are possibly Isma'ili.[58]

The *Saibaba MS* includes three identical lists of the ten Hindu *avatars*, on pages 47 [K91], 128 [K10], and 129 [K9]. This list differs somewhat from the traditional *puranic* Sanskrit list of Vaisnava *dasavataras*. Another list of *dasavatars* is given in Marathi in *Devanagari* script by Narasimhaswami, which originally appeared in the notebook which was shown to him by Abdul, and which he published in *Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings* (CS, shown below).[59] These three lists are shown for comparison, along with a composite *Khoja* list compiled from three versions of the Nizari *Isma'ili Ginan*, called *Dasa Avataras*.

	SAIBABA MS (*Urdu*)	**CS** (*Marathi*)	**KHOJA**[60] *(Khojki Script)*	**VAISNAVA** (*Sanskrit*)
1.	Macch	Matsya	Macch	Matsya
2.	Kacch	Kaccha	Korabh	Kurma
3.	Warha	Varaha	Vara	Varaha
4.	Narsivan	Narasimha	Narsang	Narasimha
5.	Vaman	Vaman	Vaeman	Vamana
6.	Parasuram	Parasuram	Farsirama	Parasurama
7.	Ram	----	Ramachandra	Ram
8.	Krsna	Krsnaji	Krsna	Balarama/ Krsna
9.	Buddha	Boddho	Buddha	Buddha
10.	Nikalanki	Kalaki	Naklanki	Kalki

As can be seen, the *Saibaba MS* list has a few deviations from the *puranic* Sanskrit list, and has similarities in common with the *Isma'ili Khoja* list. For example, both the *Saibaba MS* and the *Khoja* list have *Macch* for *Matsya*, *Nikalanki/Naklanki* for *Kalki*, and *Kacch/Korabh* for *Kurma*. The differences may be due to variances in regional spelling, but it is significant that the *Saibaba MS* lists more closely resemble the *Khoja* list, again suggesting some *Isma'ili* influence. Narasimhaswami does not offer any comment or explanatory note regarding these variations. However, we do know that the *Isma'ilis* reformulated the position of the *Imam* within the Hindu divine framework, taking *Naklanki* (Sanskrit: *Niskalangka*, meaning literally, 'unspotted'), the tenth *avatar* who is designated to come in the future, as identical with the *Imam* who is to come as Saviour. The eschatological fulfilment which was foreseen by the Hindus as being ushered in by the tenth *avatar Kalki*, was transformed into the Islamic *Mahdi* also known by the *Isma'ilis* as '*Qaim*'. The tenth *avatar* would come not only to fight the forces of evil but also to save mankind from rebirth. The *Isma'ilis* viewed this 'World Saviour' as an earthly epiphany of 'Ali. In addition they identify the *Qur'an* as the last of the Vedas.[61]

The *da'i* (missionaries) of the Nizari *Isma'ilis* in Western India freely adopted many other Hindu motifs and myths and developed these as *gnans* (sometimes spelt *ginans*), a term derived from the Sanskrit, *jnana*, meaning knowledge or wisdom.[62] These *ginans* became essentially vehicles for expressing esoteric knowledge, mystical poems, moral and religious instruction, and legendary histories of the *pirs* and their miracles. Initially the *ginans* were transmitted orally, only being recorded from the sixteenth century onward. This development led to the adoption of a more local Indian name of the *Satpanth* (True Way) for the unorthodox *Isma'ilis* in India. The *Satpanth* traces its history first to a twelfth century Nizari missionary sent to the Sindh named Nur al-Din, also known as Nur Satagur. But the sect's greatest exponent was Pir Sadr al-Din, who was appointed head of the *Isma'ilis* in India in 1430, taking the Hindu name

Sahadev, after the fifth Pandava in the epic *Mahabharata*. He converted a Hindu caste called Lohanas to the *Isma'ili* sect, and on conversion they received the Persian name *Khwaja* (Lord or Master) from which the name *Khoja* was subsequently derived. Sadr al-Din is also the author of the '*Dasa Avatara*' (The Tenth Incarnation). These developments all occurred in Western India, in Sai Baba's own 'backyard' so to speak, so it is not surprising that he had a familiarity and affinity with these ideas.

The Nizari *Isma'ili* tradition also syncretizes the Hindu triad with the founders of Islam: Brahma is identified with Mohammad, Siva with Adam and Vishnu with 'Ali.[63] In the *Saibaba MS* we find on page 127 [K11], that Sai Baba points out similar but different parallels equating Brahma with 'Ali, Vishnu with Allah and Shiva Mahadeva with Mohammed and the angel of death - *Malik al-maut*.[64] It appears from the *Saibaba MS* that Sai Baba may have simply intended to point out the similarities of the two faiths, clothed in different language and imagery.

A number of ideas recorded in the *Saibaba MS* appear to echo those attributed to the Nizari *Isma'ili* poet, Pir Shams, in his 11-couplet *ginan*. At the risk of going off on a tangent I am presenting this *ginan* here as the similarity is so striking. Some of the more significant parallels will be referenced to the *Saibaba MS* in a later chapter.

> The Creator (*Khaliq*) is in my heart and in all else too;
> He has brought the Eternal Universe into existence. (1)
> Listen to me you *Mullas* and *Qadis* -
> Who created the Universe? (2)
> He brought the whole world into being out of clay.
> Who in this world is a Hindu and who a Musalman? (3)
> The Hindu goes to sixty-eight places of pilgrimage,
> while the Muslim goes to the mosque. (4)
> Yet neither the Hindu nor the Muslim knows my Lord,
> who sits - Pure. (5)
> My mind is my prayer mat, *Allah* is my *Qadi*
> and my body my mosque. (6)
> Within I pass my time in prayer

What can the vulgar and the ignorant know of my Way? (7)
I eat only when food is available,
or else I fast, remaining absorbed in my Lord's remembrance.(8)
The true believer is one who is aware of all the mysteries.
Let knowledge (*'ilm*) guide your path. (9)
Only through complete concentration can one achieve
illumination. Seek hard and you shall find. (10)
Heed what Pir Shams says,
How will you reach the shore without a guide (*Pir*)? (11)[65]

Sheikh Abdul Razzak Biyabani

While the Nizari Isma'ilis and the *Sufi* poet-saints of the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, made a substantial contribution to the accommodation of Hindu ideas, Sai Baba strongly endorsed and re-echoed the same theme in the nineteenth century. Within the spiritual community, the process of accommodation continues into the twentieth century in the person of Sheikh Biyabani of Pune (*see* Plate 22; note the similarity of his head-dress to that of Sai Baba), whose name has been introduced earlier. I had the privilege of meeting this *Sufi pir* Sheikh Abdul Razak Biyabani in 1990 in Pune, and it is clear that he has made profound efforts throughout his life to unite the *Sufi* and Hindu communities. Although Sheikh Biyabani was too young at the time to remember Sai Baba, his family had connections with the saint of Shirdi, for the Biyabani *silsila* goes back for centuries, originally being centred in Warangal. The family still possesses a printed *silsila* list of the chain of successors, showing that Afzal Shah Biyabani died in 1856, and had connections with Bannemiya of Aurangabad. The Biyabani *silsila* in Warangal split after the death of *Pir* Afzal Shah, one branch continuing through his disciple Bannemiya in Aurangabad, while the other went to Poona. As noted earlier, Bannemiya was a contemporary and most likely a youthful friend of Sai Baba, when he stayed some years in and around Aurangabad..

Sheikh Biyabani, being fluent in Urdu, Marathi and English, has translated his linguistic understanding into seeing and explaining the underlying parallels in the two distinct expressions of spiritual wisdom expounded by the *Sufis* and the *bhaktas*. In his booklet *Dharmace marma* - The Heart of Religion, he elucidates their common beliefs and their differences. For instance, he observes that the Lord being formless and without qualities wished to experience his Self, so took the form of pure consciousness made up of light, love and bliss. From this form came the three *gunas,* origin, maintenance and dissolution, which in time took the form of creator, maintainer and destroyer, known as Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. From there he adopted the characteristics of being born in a womb. Herein lies the origin of *avatars* and the Hindu pantheon of deities. Biyabani goes on to say:

> What is more, this very thing has been said according to the religion of Islam, i.e. that the Lord was affected by a strong desire for self-experience and from within his secret treasure houses he created the entire universe. He adopted the basic ninety-nine names of his characteristics. From these I will mention some: 1. *Khalik*, the creator, that is Brahma; *Abdul Khalik* means Brahmadas [servant of Brahma]; 2. *Rajhak-Annadata*, the sustainer, means Vishnu; *Abdul Rajhak* means Vishnudas; *Kahar*, the destroyer, that is Mahes [Shiva]....which are different names of the Lord's, that is *Allah's* characteristics...But, as the worship of images is strictly prohibited in the religion of Islam, we do not see them. Nevertheless, as a result of praying (*japa*) to any of the characteristic names of the Lord it is possible to obtain that characteristic.[66]

While Sheikh Biyabani's message has so far reached only a limited audience, Sai Baba's message is beginning to resound around the world as his popularity as a divine saint or *avatar* has suddenly taken a leap forward in the last ten years. Shirdi Sai temples are springing up in Northern India and even Bangalore, and many Shirdi Sai statues are being established in Sathya Sai Baba centres in many countries throughout the world. Thus, there is an implicit message that essentially the *Sufis* and the *bhaktas* have the same goal and many of the same practices, albeit couched in a different language and with different practices and ritual. The next chapter will give a brief overview of the common beliefs and practices that they share.

NOTES

The Marathi version of all the quotations from the works of the Sufi Poet-saints has been omitted here but can be found in full in the endnotes of the original Ph.D. thesis, at the University of Toronto.

1. Tulpule, *Classical Marathi Literature*, p. 378.
2. The Marathi spelling of Shah Muntoji will be used hereafter in this book. He is also known as Shah Mutabji Qadiri, or Murtaji Qadiri. He was also known by the Hindu epithet Mrtumjaya. See Dhere, *Musalman Marathi Samta Kavi*, pp 6-36.
3. The Marathi spelling of Shekh Mahammad will be used hereafter in this book. He is also known as Sayyad Shekh Muhammad Qadiri.
4. The Marathi spelling of Shah Muni will be used hereafter in this book.
5. Example from Asghar Ali Engineer, "Seminar in Sufism and Communal Harmony: A Reportage", in *Sufism and Communal Harmony* (Jaipur: Printwell, 1991), p. 11.
6. Hussen Ambarkhan quoted in Dhere, *Musalman Marathi Samta Kavi*, pp. 46-47.
7. Wagle, "Hindu-Muslim Interactions", p. 57.
8. Tulpule, *Classical Marathi Literature*, p. 378. Tulpule uses this expression with regard to Shekh Mahammad, but it also sums up the attitude of most of the Muslim poet-saints.
9. Mahipati, *Bhaktavijaya* (Stories of Indian Saints), trans. by Justin E. Abbott and Narhar R. Godbole, 4th ed., 2 vols. (rpt; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988).
10. Dhere, *Musalman Marathi Samta Kavi*, p. 28.
11. Dhere, *Musalman Marathi Samta Kavi*, p. 37.
12. Shah Muntoji, *Pancikarana*, quoted in Dhere, *Musalman Marathi Samta Kavi*, pp. 36-37.
13. Narayan H. Kulkarnee, "Medieval Maharashtra and Muslim Saints-Poets" in N.N.Bhattacharyya, *Medieval Bhakti Movrements in India*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1989, p. 219
14. Hanumadatmaja, *Purnananda Carita*, 16:238, and Dhere, *Musalman Marathi Samta kavi*, p. 3. Note the use of the term *khuda* in Marathi for God.
15. Dhere, *Musalman Marathi Samta kavi*, p.3. Pandharpur is famous for its temple of Vitthala, the God Vishnu.

16. *Purnanada Caritra*, 16:266; 4:270; Quoted in Dhere, *Musalman Marathi Samta Kavi*, pp. 6-7.
17. Mahipati, *Bhaktavijaya*, 41:55-59.
18. Mahipati, *Bhaktivijaya*, 41:59
19. Dhere, *Musalman Marathi Samta Kavi*, p. 9. For a biographical summary and references see Tulpule, *Classical Marathi Literature*, pp. 363-64.
20. DE, p. 10.
21. LSB, III:167.
22. Wagle, 'Hindu-Muslim Interactions in Medieval Maharashtra', p. 57.
23. Dhere, *Musalman Marathi Samta Kavi* p. 87.
24. Dhere, *Musalman Marathi Samta Kavi*, p. 87.
25. Wagle, "Hindu-Muslim Interactions in Medieval Maharashtra", p. 57.
26. Dhere, *Musalman Murathi Samta Kavi*, p. 86.
27. Tulpule, *Classical Marathi Literature*, p. 377.
28. YS, 17:18
29. YS, 11:95
30. Mahipati, *Bhaktavijaya*, II:277-79.
31. Dhere, *Musalman Marathi Samta Kavi*, pp. 86, 99.
32. YS, 1.
33. YS, 12:38-41.
34. YS, 10:38.
35. KS, no. 130.
36. YS, 5:78-84.
37. DE, p. 87.
38. CS, nos. 1-7.
39. LSB, III:177.
40. CS, No. 408.
41. DE, p. 79.
42. CS, No. 293.
43. CS, No. 60.
44. CS, No. 196.
45. SB, 2:129-132.
46. SB, 2:129-32.
47. SB, 1:15.
48. Dhere, *Musalman Marathi Samta Kavi*, p. 119.
49. SB, 18:13-17.
50. SB, 18:97-117.
51. SB, 18:97-117.
52. SB, 45:92-5.
53. SB, 50:355-64.
54. SB, 46:15.
55. CS, No 122, pp. 28-9.
56. Azam Nanji, *The Nizari Isma'ili Tradition in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent* (New York: Caravan Books Delmar, 1978), p. 114.

57. Lucas Ralli, *Sai Messages for You and Me*, Vol. I pp. 108-109, 145.
58. CS, No. 147.
59. CS, No. 147. This page is not part of the manuscript which is in my possession, which consists of only Urdu and Modi text.
60. Nanji, *Nizari Isma'ili Tradition*, p. 112.
61. More information on the *Satpanthi's* concept of *avatar* is given in the unpublished Ph.D. dissertation by Gulshan Khakee, entitled, 'The Dasa Avatara of the Satpanthi Isma'ilis amd Imam Shahis of Indo-Pakistan,' Harvard University, 1972.
62. *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. IV, p. 206.
63. Najm al-Ghani Khan Sahib, *Madhahib al Islam* (Lucknow: 1924), quoted in J.N. Hollister, *The Shi'a of India* (London: Luzac & Company, 1953), p. 357.
64. Hollister, *Shi'a of India*, p. 357. Hollister is of the opinion that the *ginan* '*Das Avatar*' clearly illustrates the concessions that were made to a non-Islamic faith in order to win converts.
65. Catalogue of *Khojki* Manuscripts, MS 58, fols. 182-85, cited in Nanji, *Nizari Isma'ili Tradition*, pp. 121-22.
66. Skyhawk, 'The Heart of Religion', p. 124.

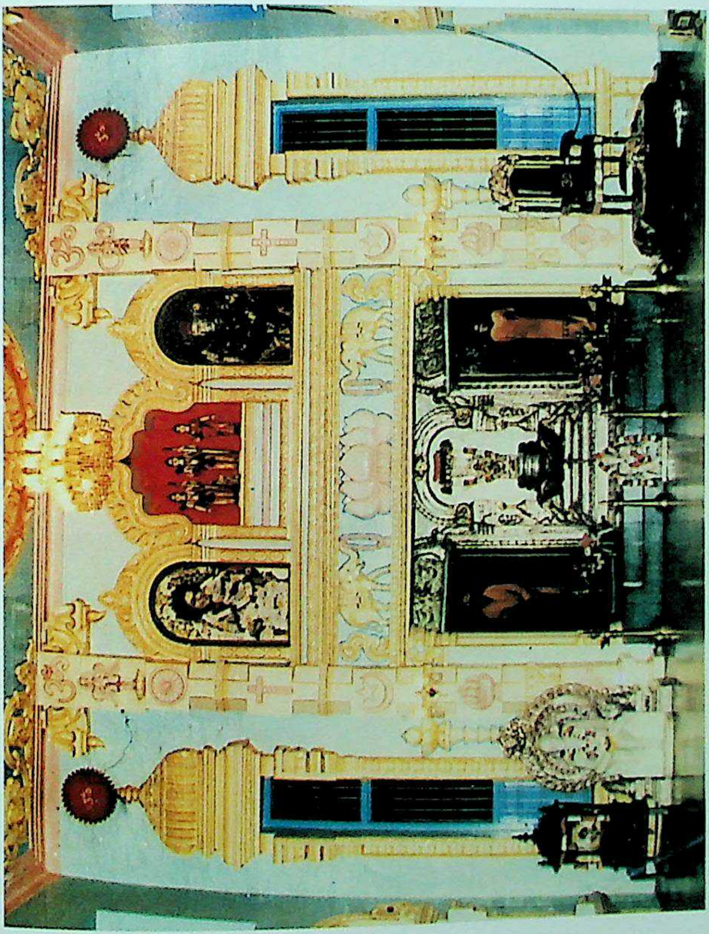


Plate 1. The interior of the Mandir at Prasanthi Nilayam showing the life-size picture of Shirdi Sai Baba on the left side of the altar. (*see* p. xiii)

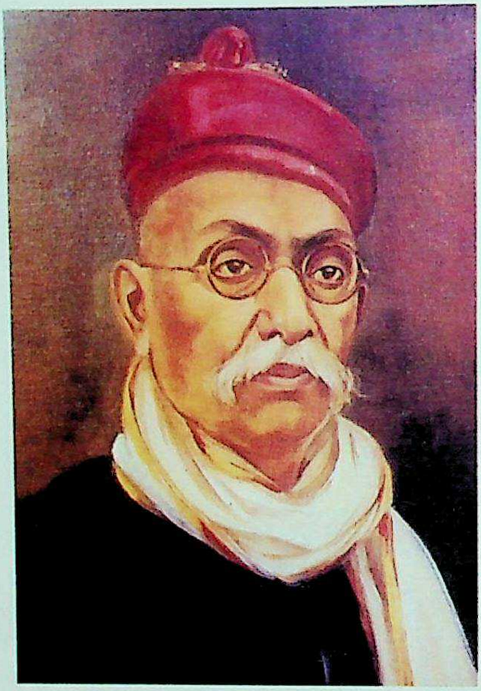


Plate 2. The orthodox Hindu appearance of Govind Raghunath Dabholkar, the Brahman author of *Sri Sai Saccarita*, the Marathi biography of Sai Baba of Shirdi. (*see* p. 4).

Plate 3. The orthodox Hindu appearance of Das Ganu, *kirtankar* and Sai Baba's devotee. (*see* p. 8)

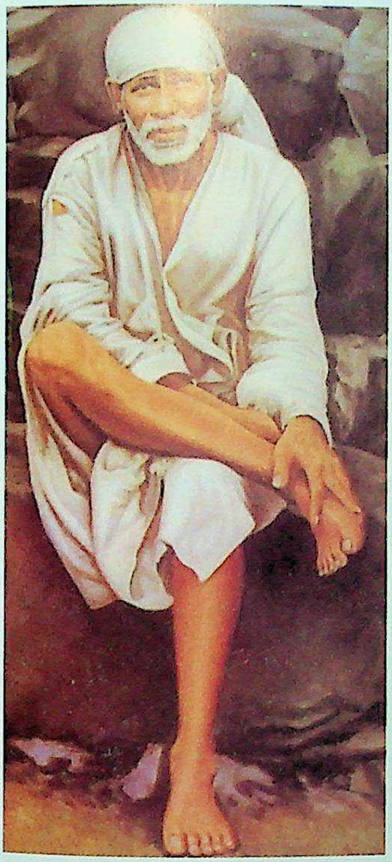


Plate 4. An original photograph of Sai Baba of Shirdi in his characteristic pose with his right leg resting on his left knee, which has inspired a number of paintings. (*see* p. 28)

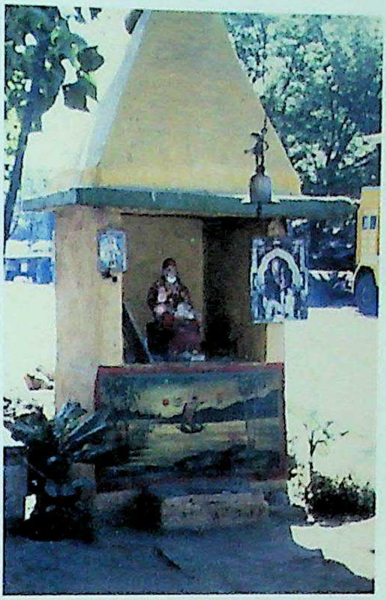


Plate 5. A wayside shrine dedicated to Sai Baba in Bombay. (*see* p. 28)

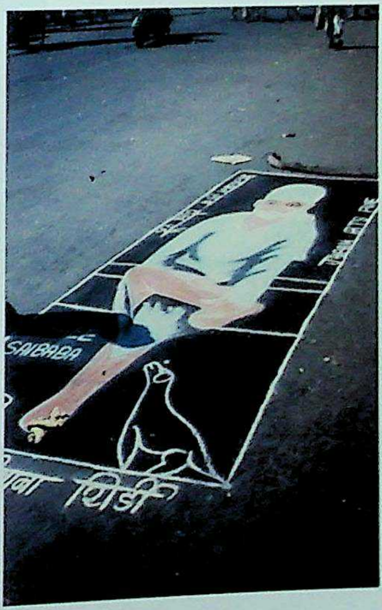


Plate 6. A pavement chalk drawing in Pune showing Sai Baba sitting in his characteristic pose with one leg over the other. (*see* p. 28)

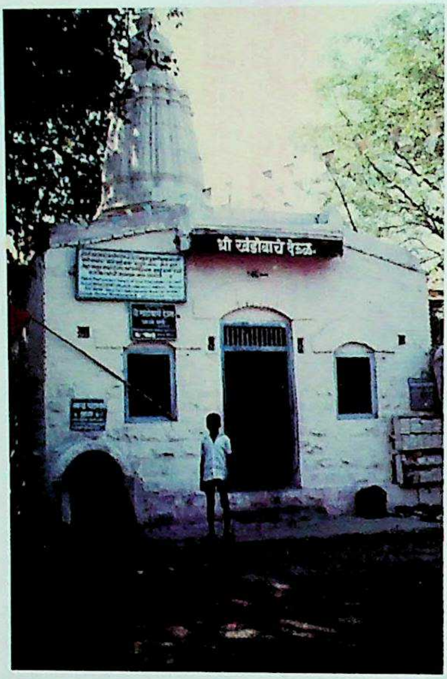


Plate 7. The temple dedicated to the local deity Khandoba in Shirdi as it is today. (*see* p. 43).

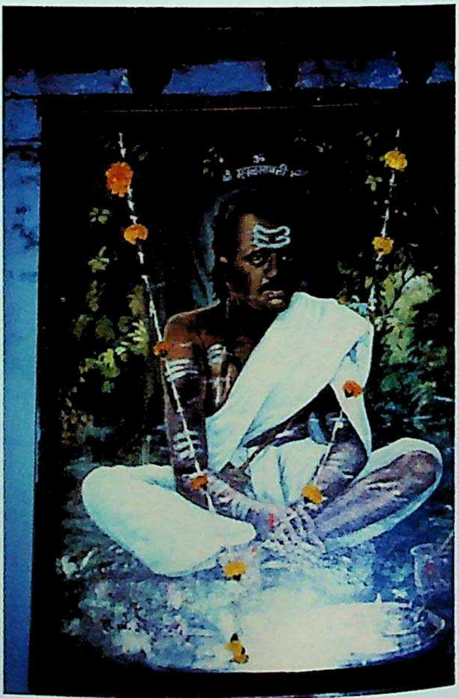


Plate 8. A painting of Mhalsapati which hangs in the Khandoba Temple today. The deity Khandoba is said to be an *avatar* of Shiva, hence the horizontal three white lines on the forehead of Mhalsapati. (*see* p. 44)

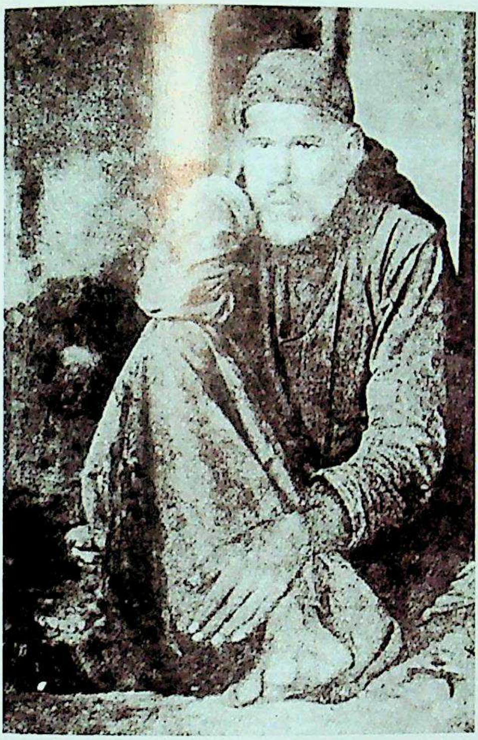


Plate 9. A rare old photograph of Sai Baba as a poor young *sufi faqir*. This photograph has been the inspiration for a number of similar paintings. (*see* p. 45)

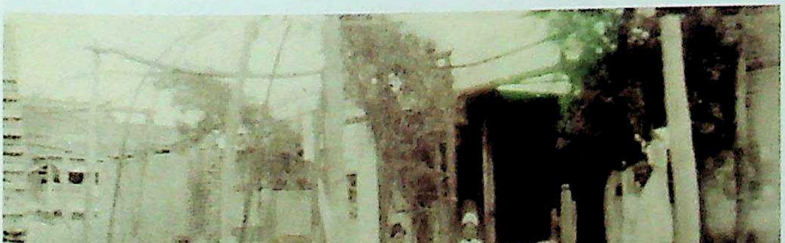


Plate 10. An old photograph of the dilapidated old *masjid* on the outskirts of the village of Shirdi, before the crowds came. (*see* p. 45)

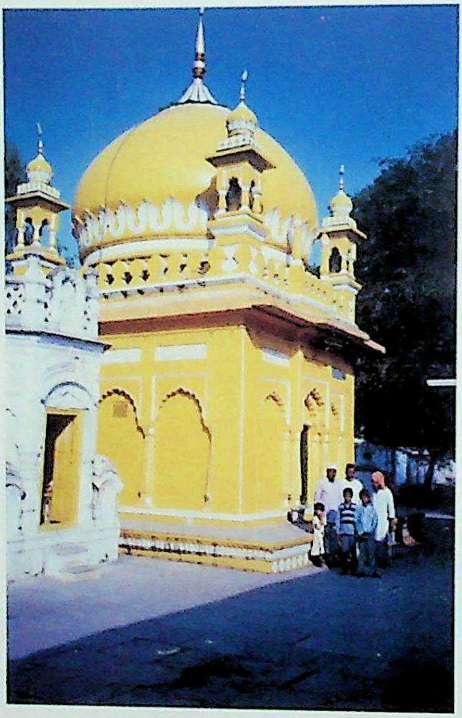


Plate 11. The traditional style of *sufi* tomb inside the domed structure of the *dargah*. The tomb is covered with flowers, and protected by a low railing. (*see* p. 48)

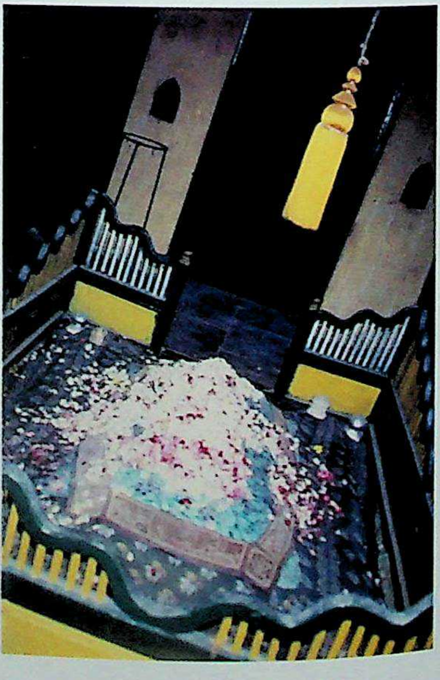


Plate 12. The *dargah* of Nizamuddin Aurangabadi in Aurangabad as it is today.(*see* p. 48)

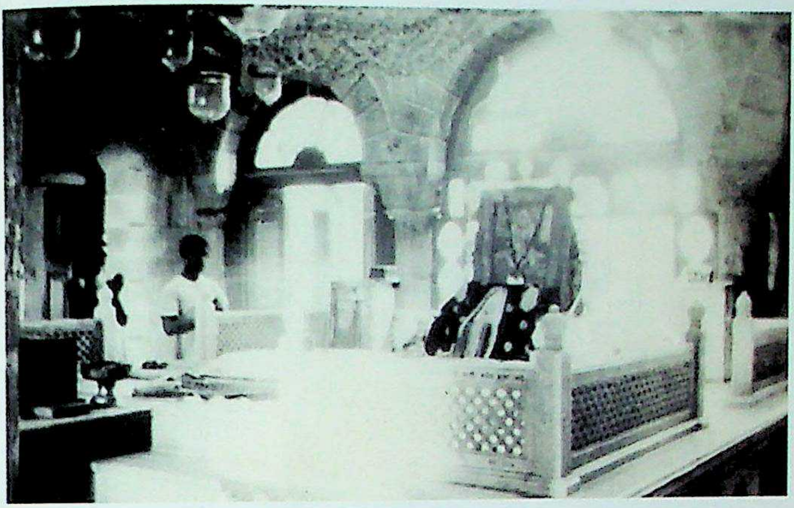


Plate 13. An early view of the tomb after the railing was installed. (*see* p. 48)

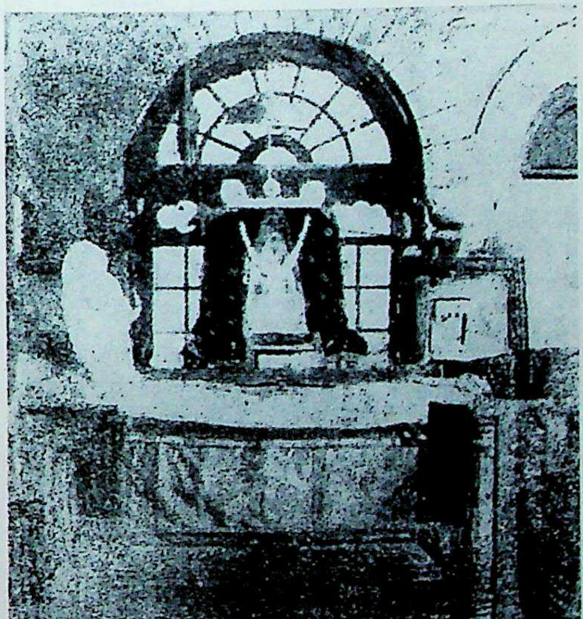


Plate 14. An old photograph of Sai Baba's tomb as it looked soon after his burial in the Buty *Wada.* (*see* p. 48)

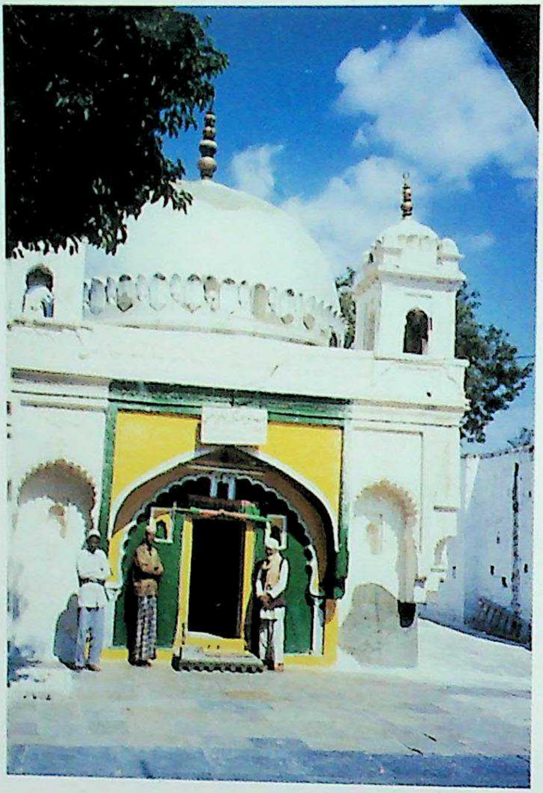


Plate 15. The entrance to the *dargah* of Zar Zari Zar-bakhsh in Khuldabad. (*see* p. 90)

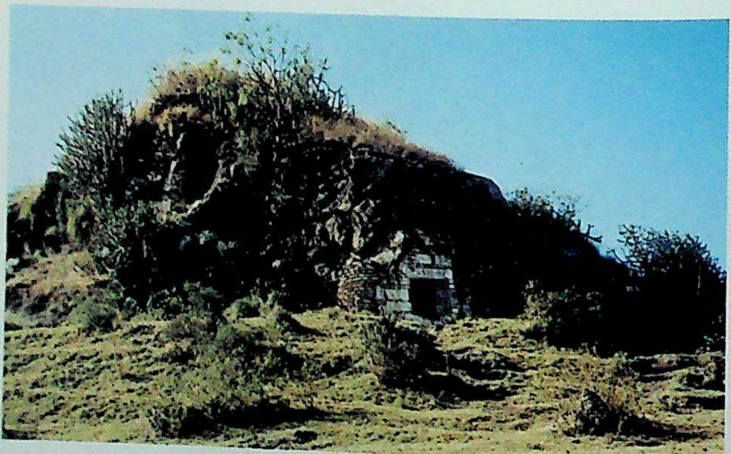


Plate 16. The cave which Zar Zari Zar-bakhsh is reputed to have used for meditation in the 13th century; also said to be used by Sai Baba in the 19th century. (*see* p.93)

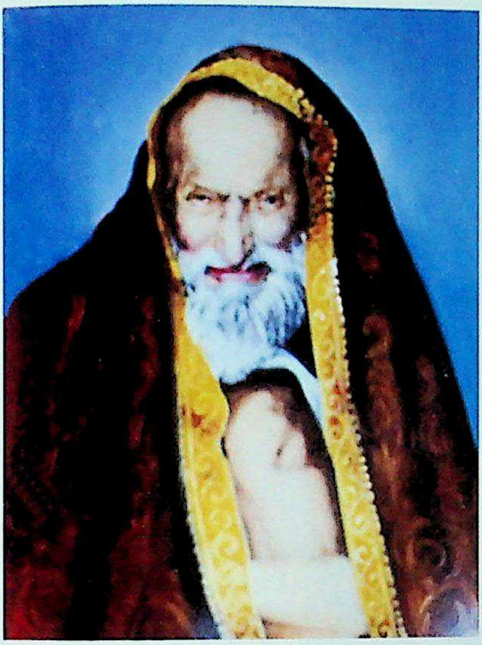


Plate 17. A picture of Bannemiya given to the author by his grandson, Haja Saheb. (*see* p. 117)

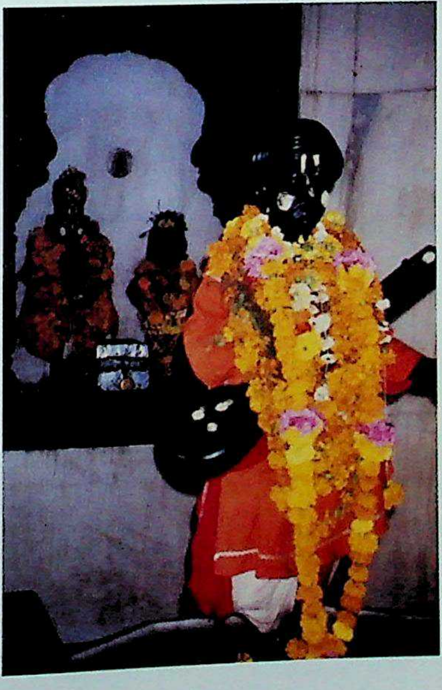


Plate 18. The black statue of Tukaram at Dehu, which is still revered today with daily garlands. Note the deity Vitthala and his consort Rukhmini in the background. (*see* p. 135)

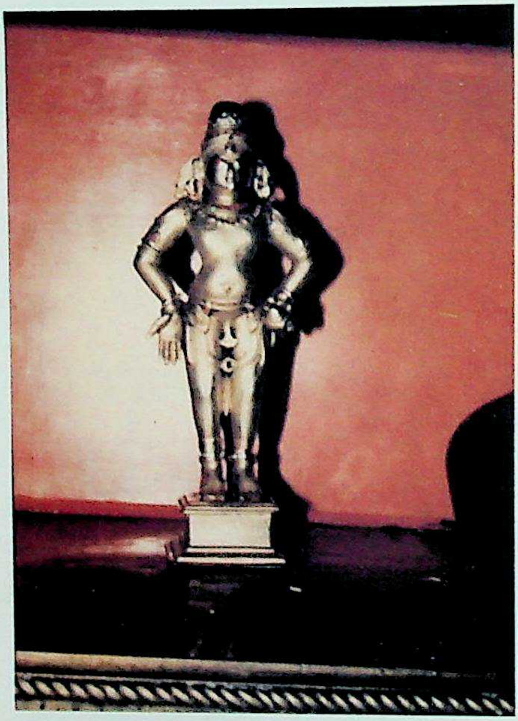


Plate 19. The *murti* of the deity Vitthala shown with arms akimbo, standing on a brick. (*see* p. 137)

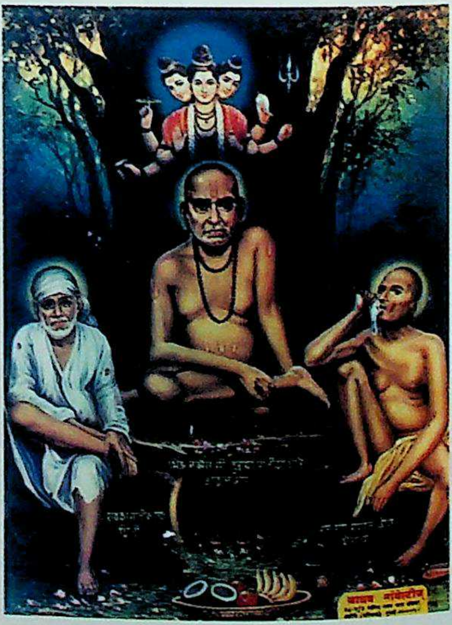


Plate 20. An old painting which shows the three 19th-century *avatars* of Dattatreya, Akkalkot Maharaj (centre), Gajanan Maharaj (right) and Sai Baba (left) with Dattatreya (above). (*see* p. 142)

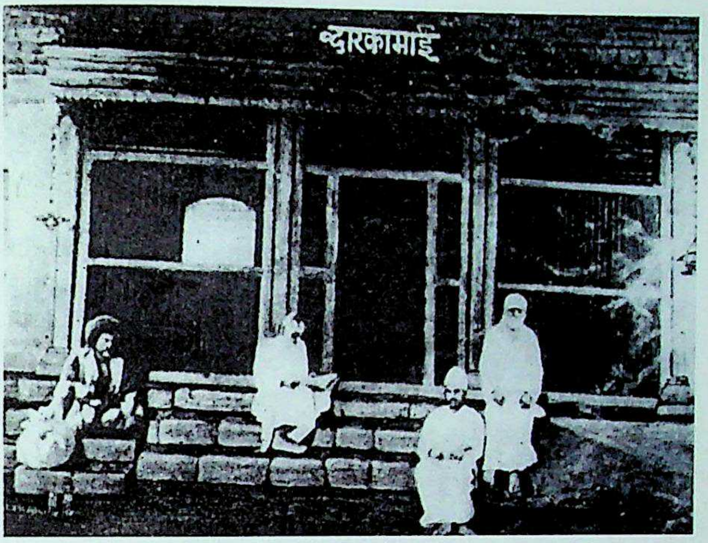


Plate 21. The *masjid* as it looked probably before the turn of the century, with Shirdi Sai Baba on the right. Sai Baba's name for the *masjid*, '*Dwarakamayi*' is written above the entrance in Marathi script. (*see* p. 168)

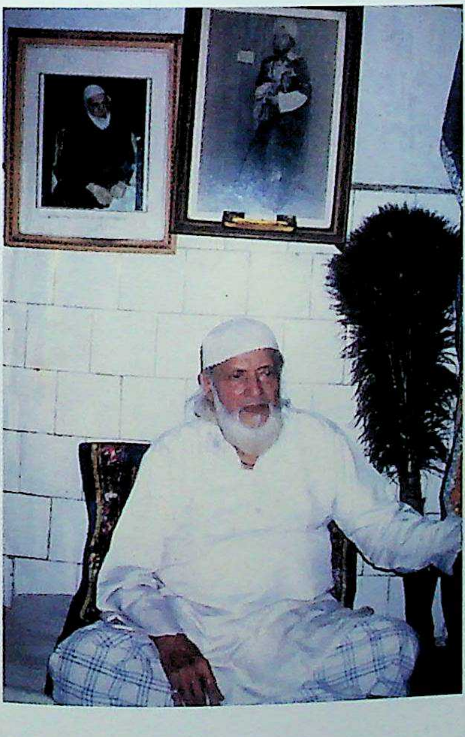


Plate 22. Sheikh Abdul Razak Biyabani in his *sufi* hospice in Pune in 1991. (*see* p. 180)

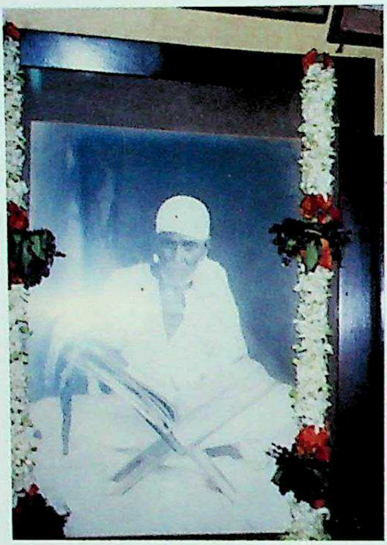


Plate 23. A photograph of Abdul with the large copy of the *Qur'an*. (*see* p.264)

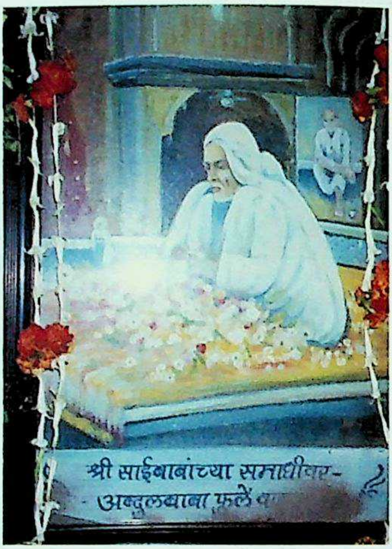


Plate 24. A painting of Abdul caring for Sai Baba's tomb. This is very reminiscent of a *pirzada* taking care of a *dargah*. (*see* p.268)

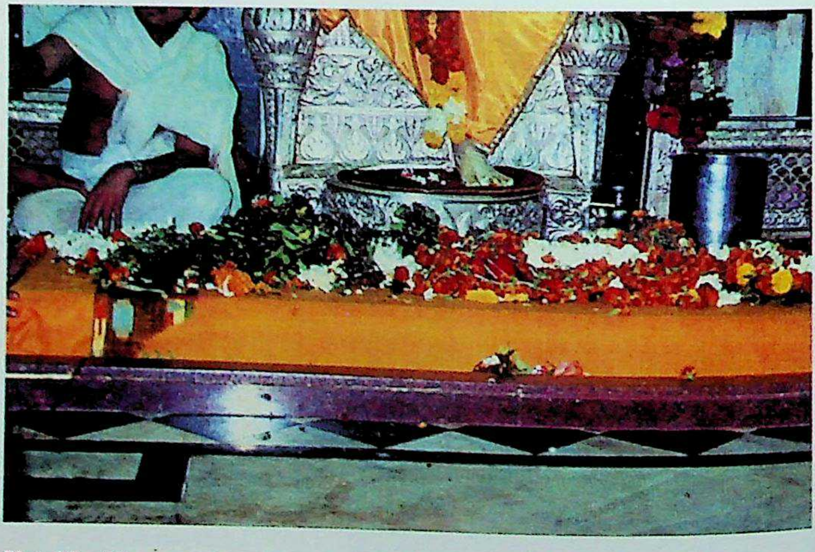


Plate 25. Flowers and *malas* (garlands) and a cloth (like a *gilaf*) are still kept to this day covering Sai Baba's tomb. (*see* p.268)

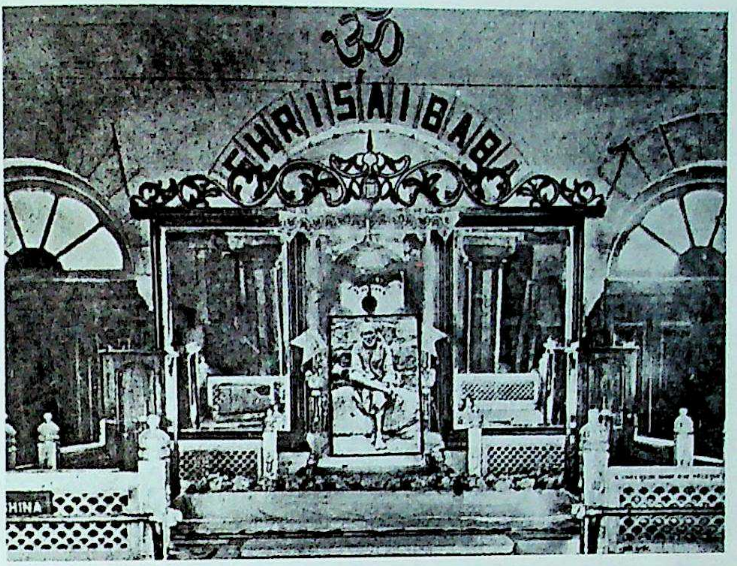


Plate 26. With Hindu influence the tomb area starts to become more ornate, with a larger picture of Sai Baba, an ornamental umbrella and an Om sign etc. The original windows are still visible in this old photograph. (*see* p. 269)

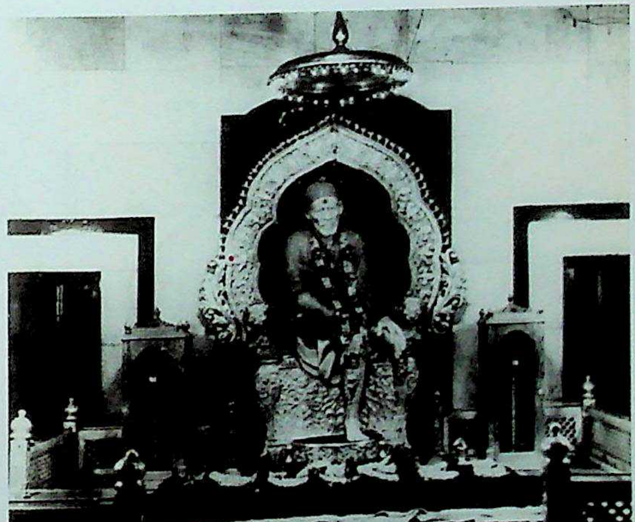


Plate 27. The white marble *murti* of Sai Baba soon after it was installed behind the tomb in 1954. (*see* p. 269)

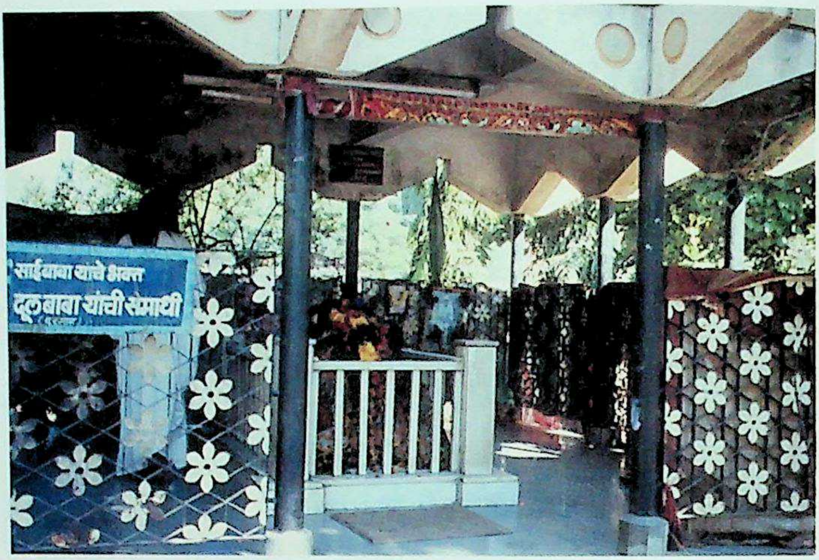


Plate 28. Abdul's tomb consisting of a mound surrounded by a railing and covered with flowers, located in shrine complex near the Lebdi Bagh. (*see* p. 270)

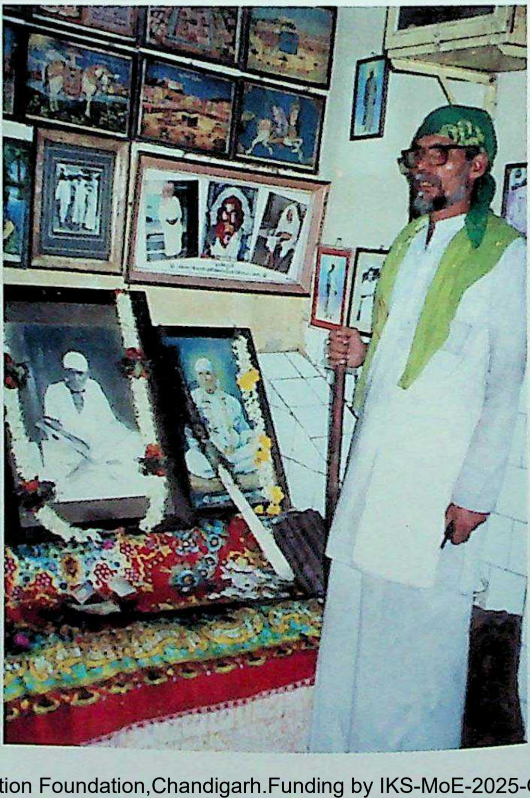


Plate 29. Abdul's room near the *chavadi*, which is kept as a memorial to him. (*see* p. 270)

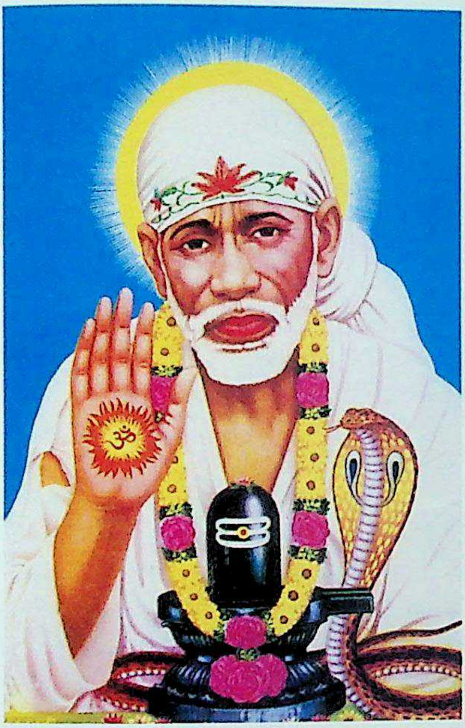


Plate 30. Poster art showing Shirdi Sai with the Shiva Lingam. (*see* p. 338)

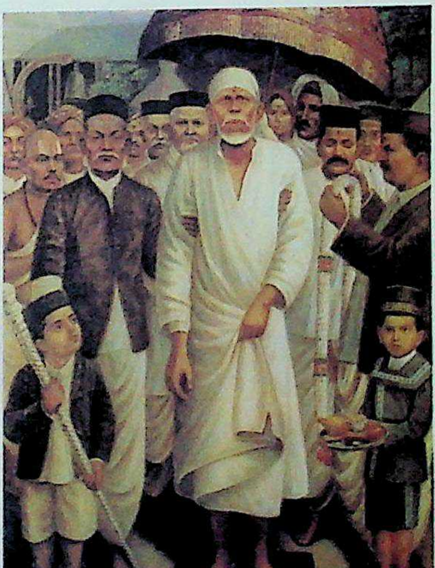


Plate 31. A well-known photograph showing Sai Baba in his way to the *chavadi*, surrounded by his close devotees. Note the ornamental umbrella, the man holding a flower garland and the boy with the *puja* items including a coconut. (*see* p. 344)

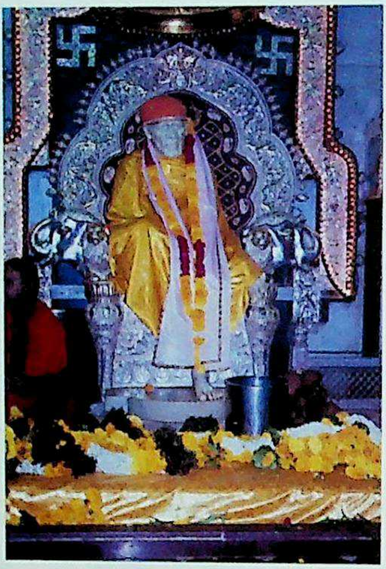


Plate 32. The marble figure of Sai Baba seated on a silver throne as it appears in the *Samadhi Mandir* in Shirdi today. (*see* p. 367)

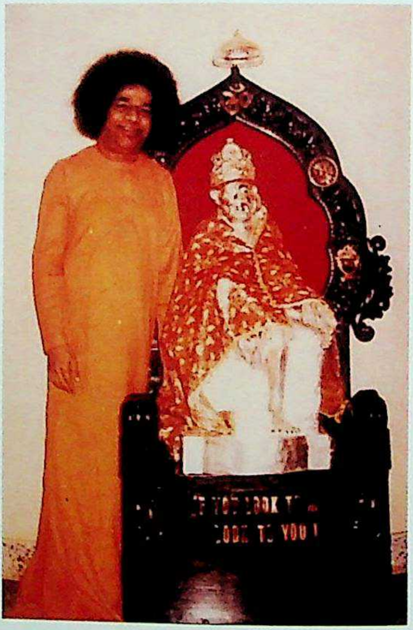


Plate 34. Sri Sathya Sai Baba posing with a large silver *murti* of Sai Baba of Shirdi. (*see* p. 376)

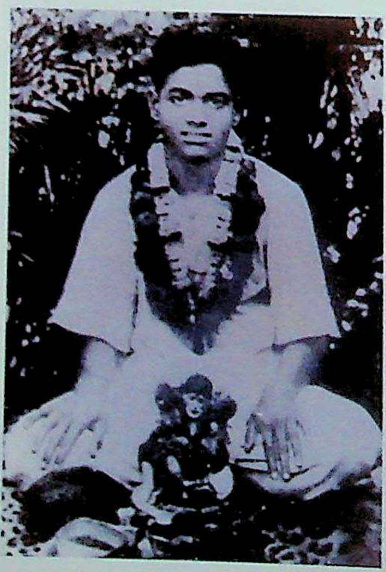


Plate 33. Sri Sathya Sai Baba as a youth, sitting in front of a small *murti* of Sai Baba of Shirdi that he has materialized. (*see* p. 367)

CHAPTER SEVEN

Outwardly Different - Inwardly the Same

If Sai Baba was a *Sufi* saint, one may ask, how is it that he has been so readily interpreted and embraced by the Hindu community? In previous chapters we have discussed Sufism in general, and Deccani Sufism in particular with its poet-saints, as well as the strong devotional heritage of the *Bhakti movement* in Maharashtra. Echoing the devotional goal of God-realization of both the *Sufis* and the *bhaktas* which the former call *ma'rifa* and the latter *brahmavilasa,* Sai Baba said "reaching God is the aim".[1] Although the eleventh-century Muslim scholar, Alberuni, visiting India declared, 'The Hindus entirely differ from us in every respect'[2], at the mystic and devotional *bhakti* level there is a fundamental similarity of thought and practice, and indeed they share the same goal to have a direct experience of God. Their inner experiences tally closely, although externally they may appear very different - in their customs, language, rituals and appearance. In climbing to the top of the spiritual mountain, it can be said that the *Sufis* take a direct structured route with formal way-stations, whereas the *bhaktas* take a more informal, gentler path, but both eventually reaching the summit. Once a mystic is able to transcend the boundaries of his formal religion he enters into a state common to all mystics. The *Sufi* goes beyond the Muslim law or *shari'at,* and is preoccupied with the *tariqat* - the way to enable him to experience the ultimate reality or *ma'rifa.* The poet-saints also were intent on proclaiming through their poetic outpourings how to reach God-realization, placing great stress on saying the name of God or *namasmarana*, a practice which the *Sufis* also embrace though they term it *dhikr*. Essentially they are no different.

Culturally, the arrival of Sufism into the subcontinent of India had a profound influence upon existing Hindu society and on the newly emerging *Bhakti movement,* and vice-versa, Hinduism had a direct impact upon the Islamic mystics. This did not manifest in the addition of foreign concepts, but rather in an adaptation to existing traditions. In order to isolate and study some of the concepts and affinities shared by the *Sufi* mystics of Islam and the Vitthala *bhaktas* of the *Bhakti movement*, this section has been structured according to philosophic and religious ideas that they came to have in common.

The *Sufis* considered themselves to be humble seekers on an unconventional path that led to God. Their aim was to unlock the secrets of ultimate reality, and reach the twin states of *fana* (annihilation or passing away) and *baqa* (subsistence) in an omnipresent God. The transient and base elements of being would fade away with the help of divine grace, leaving the immortal soul's pure identity with God. The *Sufis* stressed this idea of the unity or oneness of God which they termed *tauhid*. Similarly, the *bhakti* poet-saints, who were not allied to any schools of Hindu philosophy, reached God through intense devotion alone. Their concept of God was universal, rather than sectarian, and even while worshipping Vitthala in the traditional form - nevertheless perceived him to be ultimately formless. Jnanesvar expresses this sense of *tauhid* in his *Jnanesvari*, when he asks:

> If these people were just to open their eyes a little, and look at nature, they would soon find themselves convinced about God's existence. Do they not see omnipotence everywhere? And must it not convince them about God's existence?[3]

Indeed, this philosophy was to influence all the poet-mystics who came after Jnanesvar.

The *Sufis* conceived of God being everywhere, even indwelling in man, for as the *Qur'an* states: 'We indeed created man; and We know what his soul whispers within him, and We are nearer to him than the jugular vein.'[4] Likewise Jnanesvar conceived of God speaking of his omnipresence:

> A true *bhakta* must find God everywhere, within himself as well as without himself. Therefore thou should'st remember Me always. Whatever thou seest by the eye, or hearest by the ear, or thinkest by the mind, or speakest by the mouth, whatever is internal or external, should be identified with Me, and then thou shalt find that I alone am everywhere and at all times.[5]

Tukaram also felt God's omnipresence, saying, 'Thy hand is on my head, and my heart is on Thy feet. Thus have we been interlocked, body into body, self into self. It is mine to serve, and Thine to favour.'[6]

When the *Sufi* aspirant comes to know the true meaning of the soul's unification with God, he is said to have attained the stage of *ma'rifa*. The poet-saints term this identical stage as *brahmavilasa,* which is the highest experience of which a mystic is capable. As Tukaram says, it is 'when the difference between Self and God has vanished.'[7] According to Karraz:

> These gnostics are the treasure houses of God: He deposits in them knowledge of mysteries and information concerning wonderful things . . . he raises the veil from him and makes him enter into His own and unveils to him His Glory and Majesty, and when the servant's eyes fall upon the Glory and Majesty of God, he remains outside of himself and he comes into the care of God and is freed from self for ever.[8]

Tukaram employs similar images, when describing the great spiritual power that came to him as a result of God-realization. He says 'I possess the key of God's treasury, and every kind of merchandise that may be asked for is with me.'[9] After years of meditation on the divine, the renowned *Sufi,* Bayazid Bistami, realized his essential unity with God and exclaimed that he did not know what was other than God.[10] This notion of extinction of the self in *Sufi* terminology is *fana* and after annihilation of the human attributes, the soul enjoys the state of *baqa* when the soul becomes absorbed in God and lives and moves in God. Tukaram describes the same idea of how his self has merged in God saying:

> Deep has called unto deep, and all things have vanished into unity. The waves and the ocean have become one. Nothing can come and nothing can now pass away. The Self is enveloping Himself all around. The time of the Great End has come, and sunset and sunrise have ceased.[11]

Jnanesvar describing his own unitive experience says:

> In that state of embrace, the feeling of union arises of itself, as water under water becomes one with water. As, when the wind is lost in the sky, the duality between them disappears, similarly in that ecstatic embrace, bliss alone survives.[12]

The notion of *wahdatul wujud* (unity of being) has been expounded by the *Sufi* Muhiuddin Ibn Arabi as the oneness of all existence, for at the end of the path only God is present or is found.[13] God is one reality possessing many facets, but this *Sufi* projection of God was never interpreted as idolatry. While Jnanesvar externally was attached to Vitthala, an aspect of Vishnu iconographically depicted as a statue of 'the god standing on a brick' (*see* Plate 19), he saw beyond this outward form and also condemned anthropomorphic views of God saying:

> People attribute a name to me who am nameless; action to Me who am actionless, bodily functions to Me who am bodiless; they attribute a colour to Me who am colourless; quality to One who is quality-less; hands and feet to One who is without them; eyes and ears to the eyeless and earless; family to the family-less; form to the formless; Me, who am beyond all ornament.[14]

Both the *Sufis* and poet-saints talk of God in terms of light. One of the ninety-nine names of *Allah* according to the Muslims is *al-Nur* (the Light or he who provides divine light to the entire universe).[15] Khwaja Mir Dard of Delhi was of the opinion that *nur*

- light is the most appropriate name for God and that a vision of the all-embracing divine light is the highest goal the mystic can hope for.[16] Likewise, Namdev in describing his experience of the vision of God said: 'Light as brilliant as that of a thousand Suns shone forth at once from the heavens....'[17] The poet-saints speak of God-realization as illumination. Tukaram speaks of 'the bliss of unceasing illumination' saying, 'The whole world has now become alight, and darkness is at an end.... His light is like the light of a million moons.'[18] Similarly Eknath, describing his own mystical experience also mentions light, saying that 'he dwelt in the light of the spiritual moon'[19], and he saw 'the whole world clothed in radiance'.[20] It can be noted that in the last chapter similar experiences of light are described by the Maharashtrian *Sufis*, Shekh Mahammad and Shah Muni.

An important practice of the *Sufis* is remembering the name of God constantly, termed *dhikr*. The poet-saints of the *Bhakti* movement equally stressed the importance of repetition of the name of God, reviving the ancient *bhakti* tradition of *namasmarana* (remembering the name of God). *Dhikr Allah* (recollection of the names of *Allah*) is used as a purifying practice, so that the heart may be cleared of all but God. It can lead to the conversion of human qualities into divine attributes in order to reach the state of divine love. The Qadiriyya Order divided the practice into two, *dhikr khafi* (silent recollection of the name of God), and *dhikr jali* (vocal recollection of the divine names). According to Shaikh Biyabani, 'just as a *bhakta* can obtain *darshan* (vision of the deity) or divine grace through recitation of the divine names (*namasmarana*), so also the *murid* can obtain the divine characteristics by means of the recitation of the names of the characteristics of *Allah* in the *adh-dhikr* of the *Sufis*.'[21]

In the same way all the *Varkari* poet-saints of Maharashtra insisted upon the essential efficacy of *namasmarana* or the celebration of God's name, as the means of attaining union with God, and all expound at length on the topic. 'Let the name of God always dance upon the tongue,'[22] said Namdev, and 'if there were a cessation to the utterance of the name of God in my mouth, my tongue will split a thousand fold.'[23] Eknath is even more emphatic, declaring, 'To utter the name of God is alone *bhakti*'.[24] He also authored this maxim:

> Remembrance of God is likeness of God,
> Forgetfulness of God is illusion of life.[25]

Tukaram identifies the constant repetition of God's name as 'the sole way to God-realization', and says 'the uttering of the name of God is indeed an easy way of reaching Him.'[26] He ultimately attributes all merit and benefit to uttering God's name:

> He who utters the name of God while walking, gets the merit of a sacrifice at every step. Blessed is his body. It is itself a place of pilgrimage. He who says God while doing his work, is always merged in *samadhi*. He who utters the name of God while eating, gets the merit of a fast even though he may have taken his meals. He who utters the name of God without intermission receives liberation though living.[27]

Tukaram spoke from personal experience for in a dream he was initiated by his spiritual teacher named Babaji who gave him the mantra, '*Rama Krishna Hari*'. He wrote:

> Let my mind go after the name of God and sing his praises. My early life was embittered by calamities; but the Name gave me comfort. The happiness I derived from the Name was incomparable. The Impersonal took on a form. I found that God runs to the place where the name is celebrated.... the name is verily the pathway to heaven.[28]

Tukaram's knowledge and respect for Islam is clear from his poem:

> First among the great names is *Allah*, never forget to respect it.
> *Allah* is verily one, the prophet is verily one.
> There Thou art one, there Thou art one, there Thou art one, O friend.

> There is neither I nor thou.[29]

For most of Tukaram's life he was engaged as a *kirtankar* spreading the glory of God's name and after his experience of realizing God, he tells us that 'all houses and palaces have now become the temples of God. Whatever I hear is the name of God.'[30]

The Maharashtrian mystics all asserted that God-realization was not restricted to any one caste. Islam did not officially recognize caste distinctions, although vestiges did remain after lower caste Hindus and outcastes (untouchables) had converted en masse to Islam. Life in an Indian *Sufi khanqah* was based on brotherhood and cooperation. Everything revolved around the *pir*, who was completely oblivious to whether it was a Muslim king or pauper, Brahmin or outcaste, who came to him for guidance. In fact, most of the Maharashtrian poet-saints were from lower castes. Namdev, for instance, who became so eloquent a devotee of Lord Vitthala later in life, started life as a low caste marauder. According to the hagiography, he killed eighty-four horsemen in order to rob them. When he subsequently met one of the widows and heard her tale of woe, he was so filled with remorse that he dedicated his life to God thereafter.[31] Tukaram declares in his *abhangas* that caste has no significance for God-realization, and that God accepted him even though he was a man of low birth.

> Pride of caste has never made any man holy, says Tuka. The untouchables have crossed the ocean of life by God-devotion, and the Puranas sing their praises....Gora, the potter, Rohidasa, the shoemaker, Kabira, the Muslim, Sena, the barber, Kanhopatra, the concubine.... Chokamela, the outcast.... Janabai, the maid, have all become unified with God by their devotion.[32]

The *Varkaris* were distinctive in medieval Hinduism for their disregard for caste in terms of devotion to God. Anyone who sincerely wished to sing *bhajans* in praise of God, and who wished to go twice a year on pilgrimage to Pandharpur was welcome. The

Varkari panth, with their tradition of participation of all castes, continues to this day.

Love of music was a shared passion between *Sufis* and followers of the *Bhakti movement*. The *Sufis,* especially the Chishtiyya, regarded music (*sama)* as the food of the soul. They extolled God through the singing of *qawwalis*. The poet-saints sang of the glories of God through *abhangas, bhajans* and *kirtans* and most became renowned *kirtankars*, extolling God through music, dance and song. Khwaja Gesudaraz was very fond of music and it was through his influence that music festivals became very popular in the Deccan, to the chagrin of the more orthodox Muslims. Music was said to inflame a state of ecstasy which is permissible for those with discretion.[33]

Lastly, Sufism and Bhakti Hinduism both agree on the pivotal role of the *guru* on the spiritual path. The Hindu tradition has always held that a *guru* was necessary for spiritual development. Perhaps due to the lack of a unified hierarchical organisation, an adept teacher plays an important role in the transmission of religious knowledge. It is a Hindu belief that only through evolution, *karma* and reincarnation, and education within the *guru* system, can an aspirant become perfect.[34] In the *Jnanesvari*, Jnanesvar is full of profound devotion and respect for his *guru* Nivrittinatha, and attributes all his mystic enlightenment to the grace of his *guru*. He says, 'My own ignorance turned to knowledge by the grace of Nivrittinatha', and that 'the only adequate way of expressing one's appreciation of the greatness of the *guru* is to submit in silence at the feet of the Guru for the greatness of the *guru* can never be adequately praised'.[35] The *Sufis* likewise stressed the importance of a *pir* for a disciple in order to reach *ma'rifa*.[36] The *pir* was integral to Sufism for the *Sufi* Orders grew from a charismatic *pir* who founded the Order and from each of these a chain or *silsila* of successors grew.

Thus, as has been shown briefly, at the mystic level the *Sufis* and *bhakti* poet-saints shared many basic concepts albeit couched in different language, culture and ritual. So it is not surprising that Sai Baba could be understood and interpreted so easily by the Hindu *bhaktas* as well as by the itinerant *fakirs* and *Sufis*.

NOTES

1. DE, p. 20.
2. Edward C. Sachau, ed., *Alberuni's India* (Delhi: S. Chand and Co., 1964), p. 17.
3. Ranade, *Mysticism in India*, p. 62.
4. *Qur'an* 50:15. *The Koran Interpreted*. Trans. by Arthur J. Arberry (Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 540.
5. *Jnanesvari*, VIII:75-80, quoted in Ranade, *Mysticism in India*, p. 117.
6. Tukaram, *Abhanga* no. 2761, quoted in Ranade, *Mysticism*, p. 303. Tukaram is perhaps the most loved and often quoted of all the Maharashtrian poet-saints.
7. Ranade, *Mysticism in India*, p. 303.
8. Margaret Smith, *Readings from the Mystics of Islam* (London: Luzac, 1950), no. 27. p. 31.
9. Ranade, *Mysticism in India*, p. 308.
10. Bhatnagar, *Classical Sufi Thought*, p. 58
11. Tukaram: *Abhanga* 1815, quoted in Ranade, *Mysticism*, p. 303.
12. *Jnanesvari*, V:134, quoted in Ranade, *Mysticism*, p. 126.
13. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p. 267.
14. Ranade, *Mysticism in India*, p. 63.
15. Shems Friedlander, *Ninety-Nine Names of Allah* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1978), p. 112.
16. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p. 376.
17. Namdeva, *Abhanga* p. 147.
18. Tukaram, *Abhanga* 4026, quoted in Ranade, *Mysticism*, p. 302.
19. Eknath, *Abhanga* 116.
20. Eknath, *Abhanga* 119.
21. Skyhawk, 'The Heart of Religion', p. 125.
22. Namdev, *Abhanga* 51, Ranade, *Mysticism in India*, p. 194.
23. Namdev, *Abhanga* 49, Ranade, *Mysticism in India*, p. 194.
24. Eknath, *Abhanga* 37, Ranade, *Mysticism in India*, p. 222.
25. Eknath, *Abhanga* 36, Ranade, *Mysticism in India*, p. 222.
26. Tukaram, *Abhanga* 1698, Ranade, *Mysticism in India*, p. 318.
27. Tukaram, *Abhanga* 2667, Ranade, *Mysticism in India*, p. 320.
28. Tukaram, *Abhanga* 3935, Ranade, *Mysticism in India*, pp. 276-7.
29. Tarachand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture* (Allahabad, 1946), p. 228.
30. Tukaram, *Abhanga* 1128, Ranade, *Mysticism in India*, p. 305.
31. Ranade, *Mysticism in India*, p. 186.
32. Tukaram, *Abhanga* 3241, Ranade, *Mysticism in India*, p. 326.
33. Yusuf Husain, *Glimpses of Medieval Indian Culture* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1973), p. 39.

34. Joel D. Mlecko, "The Guru in Hindu Tradition", *Numen* 29 (1982), pp. 33-61.
35. *Jnanesvari*, XV:28 and XIV:16 quoted in Ranade, *Mysticism*, pp. 50-1.
36. Bhatnagar, *Dimension of Classical Sufi Thought*, pp. 29-30.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Nineteenth Century Sufi Contemporaries of Sai Baba

As has been shown in preceding chapters, Maharashtra has long been home to a variety of Muslim and Hindu holy men, saints and mystics, each possessing varying degrees of orthodoxy, spirituality, and miracle-working powers. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Maharashtra, there were a number of unorthodox *Sufi* mystics such as Tajuddin Baba of Nagpur, Hazrat Babajan of Poona and Noori Maharaj of Thana, who were contemporaries of Hazrat Sai Baba of Shirdi. Among the Hindu saints were Manikaprabhu of Manikanagar [near Gulbarga], Narayan Maharaj of Kedgaon, Sri Swami Samarth of Akkalkot and Vasudevananda Saraswati alias Tembe Swami of Garudeswar who lived on the banks of the river Narmada. The villages and towns where these saints established themselves have today evolved into bustling pilgrimage centres with shrines, temples, *dargahs* or memorials honouring their memories, each run by a local *Sansthan* or Trust.[1] This is especially so of Shirdi which is now one of the major pilgrimage centres, and is run by the local Shirdi *Sansthan*. Muslims and Hindus alike are known to flock to these shrines seeking healing and blessings.[2]

Although heterodox for the most part, these ninteenth century saints were revered by local people for their spiritual eminence; and more importantly for their ability to help the common man with his day-to-day problems. It was due to this pragmatic element that in Maharashtra a saint's Hindu or Muslim affiliation or sectarian allegiance was considered to be of secondary importance, as it was popularly accepted that God-realization and its attendant powers transcended the narrow confines of established othodoxy.

Meher Baba (1894-1969), the Parsi holy man of Ahmednagar, considered by his followers to be an *avatar*, declared that there are five *qutbs* or Perfect masters on earth at any given time, who administer to the spiritual needs of humanity. Meher Baba identified the five Perfect masters as three *Sufi* saints and two Hindu saints currently living in Maharashtra at the turn of the century. The *Sufis* were Hazrat Tajuddin Baba, Hazrat Babajan, and Hazrat Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi and the Hindus were Sri Narayan Maharaj and Sri Upasani Maharaj. A short biography of Narayan Maharaj has already been given in a previous chapter, and Sri Upasani Maharaj was a devotee of Sai Baba who after the latter's death became a famous saint in his own right in the 1930's. A biographical sketch of Sai Baba's two *Sufi* contemporaries - Hazrat Tajuddin Baba and Hazrat Babajan is given below, highlighting their similar backgrounds, healing powers and psychic inter-connectedness on a non-physical level, and their affinity with Sai Baba.

Hazrat Tajuddin Baba

Hazrat Tajuddin Baba, known more familiarly to his devotees as Baba Sahib, was born in 1861 and in his youth joined the Madras Regiment of the British army as a *sepoy*. There was much unrest in India before and after the *sepoy* uprising of 1857. As a result the British army was extended in order to maintain law and order putting great pressure on young men to join up at this time. Like Tajuddin Baba, Sai Baba may also have enlisted when he was around the age of nineteen in 1857. There is one enigmatic reference to Sai Baba having been in the army at the time of the battle with the Rani of Jhansi in the 1857 War of Independence, although it is not clear on which side. In an interview with Narasimhaswami on July 26, 1936, Balakrishna Govind Upasani Sastri, the brother of Sai Baba's devotee Kasinath Upasani who, by the time of the interview, had become the famous saint of Maharashtra, Sri Upasani Maharaj, gave his reminiscences of Sai Baba both on his own account and in relation to his famous brother. In the course of his conversation he commented: 'Sai Baba mentioned some autobiographical reminiscences of his own.

He said he had been at the battle in which the Rani of Jhansi took part. He was then in the army.'[3] Narasimhaswami makes use of this piece of information in his biography *Life of Sai Baba,* where he says, 'Baba declared that in the first great war of Indian Independence, that he had been in the army with the Rani of Jhansi.'[4] There is a discrepancy here, for Sastri's comment leads us to believe that Sai Baba was at the battle, leaving it unclear which side he was fighting on, although the subsequent sentence that he was then in the army, would presuppose the British army. Narasimhaswami has transposed this idea, leading us to believe Sai Baba was fighting on the side of the Rani, fighting the British to win independence. These two related references are the only ones linking Sai Baba with the 1857 *Sepoy* Revolt, or as it later became known, the 'War of Independence'.[5] The story of the Rani of Jhansi and the historical background to this incident makes fascinating reading, as the story reads so differently depending on the perspective of the reader, the Rani being classed as either an arch-villain from the British side or a courageous freedom fighter from the Indian [*see* Appendix C]. Narasimhaswami has placed Sai Baba on the Indian side for he adds a further comment, 'That is, he was a fighter for Indian Independence in 1857.'[6] Unfortunately there is no further evidence either way, but the fact that Tajuddin Baba joined the British army suggests the opposite. In any event, we can conclude that it is not incompatible with later sainthood for a *Sufi faqir* when young to have joined the army. A fuller discussion of the events surrounding the 1857 uprising, and the story of the Rani of Jhansi is given in Appendix C.

Some time after this, Tajuddin Baba came into contact with a *Sufi* master called Hazrat Dawood Chishti and through his spiritual influence had an experience of God-realization, but the date and circumstances were not recorded. He was considered to have received the '*taj*' or crown of spiritual 'perfection', hence the epithet *Tajuddin*, which was the name by which he became well-known throughout Maharashtra. He left the militia and travelled to Nagpur where people flocked to him to receive his blessings. This in turn attracted more visitors who often annoyed him with their 'foolish questions'. One day he appeared naked on a tennis court where some Europeans were playing, and acted like a madman. He was apprehended, and admitted to a lunatic asylum. He was completely indifferent to his immediate surroundings and stayed in the asylum for seventeen years, but even there he attracted innumerable visitors, eager for his blessing and healing touch. Many miracles and supernatural acts are attributed to Tajuddin Baba, ranging from the cure of incurable diseases and deformities and bringing the dead back to life, to setting injustices right and promoting the welfare of people who came to him.[7] In the last year of Tajuddin Baba's life he was persuaded to leave the asylum at the insistence of the Chief of Kampti near Nagpur, and was given a place to live in his palace.

Tajuddin Baba exhibited many similarities with Sai Baba which were often remarked upon. Neither cared for worldly comforts or possessions nor were they concerned with their outward circumstances - Tajuddin Baba living in a lunatic asylum and Sai Baba in an old dilapidated mosque. Both often showed fierce anger - Tajuddin by throwing stones, and Sai Baba by terrifying even his close devotees with his outbursts of rage, his eyes glowing red, stripping off his clothes or shouting and also on occasion throwing stones. People came to visit both saints for various reasons, but the most frequent request was that the saint should cure their barrenness in order to obtain progeny. Both also were well-known as miracle-workers, specifically for their healing powers. One delightful story related about Tajuddin Baba concerned the son of the British Police Commissioner stationed at Nagpur, who was very sick. Many doctors had been consulted but all hope had been given up for the life of the young boy. The officer's driver, observing the agony of the English couple watching their son waste away, at last spoke out and told them that Tajuddin Baba, a local Nagpur *faqir*, was renowned for healing diseases, and suggested that they could not lose anything by taking the boy to see the saint. In desperation they agreed to go, only to be greeted by a hail of stones thrown at them by the uncommunicative saint. He did however signal the boy to be brought to him whereupon he lightly brushed his forehead with his hand and then waved him away. Immediately the boy began to recover to the utter amazement of the parents. Later, when the boy was completely well again, they went back to thank the saint and asked what they could do to show their gratitude. Tajuddin Baba suggested that they start a school for local children, which they did, and today this school has grown to be the main High School in Nagpur, called the Anjuman High School. There are several reported incidents where Sai Baba similarly healed a person miraculously, even after the doctors had given up hope. For example, it was reported by Khaparde in his *Shirdi Diary*, that Sai Baba completely cured his dying son who was afflicted by the plague.[8] Similarly, a doctor conducting a difficult surgery, got some of the patient's infected matter in his eye. As a result the Civil Surgeon of Nasik thought that the doctor would lose his eye, but after intense prayer to Sai Baba, it healed within the week.[9]

Many Hindu *sadhus* visited Baba Sahib to pay their respect and homage and for his spiritual guidance. There is also an interesting story told in the biography, *Hazrat Baba Tajuddin: Noor-E-Mubeen - The Divine Light of Allah*, of a young learned scholar in Islamic Philosophy called Yusuf Shah, who was sent to Nagpur to Baba Sahib. On his arrival he was disappointed that there was no library, no *khanqah*, and he observed that the Muslim *shariat* was not being strictly followed. He wondered how he could gain from a saint lost to the world living in ecstasy. Reading his mind Baba Sahib threw him out, but later plucking up courage the boy went back to him, whereupon the saint took off his *khuta* and threw it at Yusuf who immediately put it on. He at once experienced the state of ecstasy, and Baba Sahib got him to live in a well for some time, resulting in his further spiritual upliftment. There are many parallels here with Sai Baba. A learned pandit and Sanskrit scholar Kasinath Upasani came to Sai Baba, and he sent him to the Khandoba temple to live in a state of total renunciation. Sai Baba promised his total spiritual upliftment would take four years, whereupon he would be a great saint, a prediction that came to pass. Sai Baba also tells of his own experience in a well, the result of a well known *Sufi* technique, which will be described in detail in the next chapter.

Hazrat Babajan

The other *Sufi* saint, noted by Meher Baba as a Perfect master, was the female saint Hazrat Babajan, who is today viewed as one of the most famous *Sufi majzubs* of Maharashtra, with striking points of similarity with Sai Baba in terms of lifestyle and miraculous powers. From 1903 until her death in 1931, she lived under a *neem* tree at the Char Bavadi in the cantonment area of Poona. This short, wrinkled lady was instantly recognizable with her thick mane of white hair and blue eyes with an impenetrable expression, and most of the recorded memories of her, as in the case of Sai Baba, are from this later period of her life. In fact little is known of her early life or significant dates of her biography, but it is generally acknowledged that she came from an aristocratic family in Afghanistan, and was known by the name Gul-Rukh meaning 'rose-faced'. As a young woman she was an accomplished *hafiz-e-Qur'an* or one who knows the *Qur'an* by heart, and possessing a mystic nature she spent her time in meditation and prayer. At the age when young aristocratic girls such as herself were to be married, she violently opposed the idea and left home. She escaped to India, arriving first in Peshawar, then Rawalpindi, and lived a poor ascetic life until she met a Hindu saint who initiated her into the spiritual path. Years passed and she moved to Multan and met a Muslim *majzub* who bestowed God-realization upon her. On one notable occasion, in a moment of divine ecstasy, she uttered words indicating her own divine status, much as al-Hallaj uttered *ana'l Haqq* or 'I am God'. For this blasphemy she earned the orthodox Muslim punishment of death by being buried alive. Left for dead, she miraculously survived and escaped, eventually arriving in Poona. It was only after some young Baluchi *sepoys,* who had been present at her 'death', saw and recognized her as the same saintly figure whom they had witnessed being buried alive, that her spiritual greatness became known. For the next thirty years or more she lived under the *neem* tree in Char Bavadi, where she gave *darshan,* accepting only tea from devotees, and occasionally performing some miracle of healing. Meher Baba commented that as a *qutb* she could operate equally in both the spiritual world and the physical world, for the benefit of others, possessing both divinity and gnosis - *haqiqa* and *marifa*.[10]

Apart from the obvious similarities of sitting under a *neem* tree, holding *darbar* or audience, and having a number of devotees, the few recorded miracles she performed are extraordinarily similar to those of Sai Baba. Unlike Sai Baba, Babajan did not have an apostle-type scribe like Narasimhaswami to interview all the people who came to see her and collect their experiences; however, Meher Baba did record a few and Dr. A.G. Munsiff also chronicled a number. In total these miraculous occurrences constitute a twelve-page booklet which serves as her biography.[11] By contrast, Narasimhaswami chronicled the experiences of dozens of Sai Baba's devotees in a three-part book, entitled *Devotees' Experiences of Sai Baba.*

Among her alleged powers was the ability to see events at a distance. For instance on one occasion, a performance was to be given at a small theatre in Talegaon about twenty miles from Poona. The show proved to be so popular that the hall was filled to capacity, and the management decided to lock the doors. A fire suddenly broke out which spread rapidly, endangering many lives. Back in Poona, Babajan suddenly began to behave quite excitedly and angrily shouted, 'It is fire, it is fire, doors are locked and people are burning. O, you fire get extinguished!'[12] People at the theatre reported that amazingly the locks suddenly flew open and most people were saved. On tracing the exact time of Babajan's exclamation in Poona, and the time that the theatre locks spontaneously opened in Talegaon, they proved to be identical. There is a similar story in the biography of Sai Baba where he was sitting in front of his perpetual fire called his *dhuni*, when suddenly he thrust his hand and arm into the flames as if recovering something. While some devotees dragged him away from the fire to attend to his burnt arm, he said he had saved the life of a child from a furnace. Some time later it was confirmed that a blacksmith's wife in a distant village was indeed holding her child when she got up hastily to work the bellows, and forgetting the child, let it slip into the furnace. They said that an unseen hand seemed to rescue the child before it could be harmed.[13]

Babajan was also known for her ability to clairvoyantly find missing things. For instance there is a story concerning Babajan finding a lost horse. A man approached Babajan saying he had lost his horse. She merely pointed in one direction and told him he would find it if he followed her finger. This he did and found the horse coming towards him. In gratitude he brought a load of sweets for Babajan to distribute. In a similar vein there is a story about Sai Baba locating a lost mare. The Muslim Chand Patil had lost his mare two months previously and came upon a *faqir*, namely Sai Baba, who told him to look in the nearby cutting. Amazingly he found the mare right there, causing him to proclaim Sai Baba to be an *awliya* or saint.[14]

Babajan was also well-known for healing by unusual methods. For instance it was recorded that she once restored a person's eyesight by blowing on their eyes. Similarly Sai Baba reportedly cured eye problems by placing pieces of onion or other unusual substances on the person's eyes. Towards the end of her life, Babajan had a septic finger which swelled up and was full of pus. A devotee brought her some mango pickle to eat, but she immediately put some on the affected finger, which normally would infect it further, but it healed up well.[15]

Hazrat Babajan, like Sai Baba, had a death experience long before her physical demise when she was buried alive as punishment for her heretical statements. She survived to live for another thirty or more years. Sai Baba also had a death experience for three days in 1886, when local authorities wanted to bury his body, so convinced were they that he had expired. But, having warned his devotee to care for his body, he too returned to life and survived to live another thirty-two years.[16] Babajan's *dargah* is located in the cantonment area of Poona under the very same *neem* tree where she sat for so many years, and it is still frequented today by people requesting favours.

We have examined several significant correspondences between Sai Baba's teachings and *Sufi* thought of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, as demonstrated by the writings of the great *Sufi* poet-saints: Shah Muntoji Bahamani, Shekh Mahammad and Shah Muni. There are also correspondences between Sai Baba's ascetic *Sufi* lifestyle and that of his nineteenth century contemporaries, Hazrat Tajuddin Baba and Hazrat Babajan. One of the most important of these correspondences are the attempts at accommodating Islam to Hinduism. Shah Muntoji by his concordance of terms and concepts; Shekh Mahammad by clarifying the steps of the *Sufi tariqat* in current Hindu terms; and Shah Muni by pointing out that the concept of the oneness of God was common to both Hinduism and Islam. Sai Baba worked on two levels to accommodate the Hindu community. On one level he demonstrated the oneness of all the Hindu manifestations of God by granting visions of those deities to their devotees, reinforcing that "all these [Hindu deities] are *Allah*". On another level Sai Baba accommodated the Hindus by allowing various typical Hindu rituals to be performed to honour him, reiterating that people should not convert, but should follow their own religious path.

All the above saints had the cross-cultural experience of being Muslim in a largely Hindu environment, having both Hindu and Muslim devotees. Sai Baba treated individual devotees quite differently, according to their personal level of spiritual development, irrespective of their religious affiliation. Thus, he instructed the *faqir* Abdul on the *Qur'an* and guided him along the ascetic renunciate *Sufi* path, as will be shown in Part II. Although Sai Baba gained a wide reputation in the Bombay Presidency for feeding *faqirs*, and even giving money to send *Sufis* to Mecca on pilgrimage, Abdul was never the recipient of this largesse. For Mhalsapati, his long-time Hindu friend and devotee, he also prescribed a strict renunciate *sadhana*, keeping him in a state of abject poverty. However, he supported other householder-devotees, whether Hindu or Muslim, with both financial and spiritual favors, always doling out money gifts from the *daksina* collected daily from visitors. Tatya Kote Patil and Bade Baba received untold amounts of money from Sai Baba who occasionally bestowed rich gifts on them, such as an elaborate turban given to Tatya. On the other hand, Kasinath Upasani, was kept poverty-stricken in order to receive the supreme gift of spiritual upliftment, as indicated earlier. Kasinath was to reap the benefit decades later when he became the celebrated saint Sri Upasani Maharaj.

Today, all of these Maharashtrian *Sufi* saints have *dargahs* in their place of birth to which supplicants flock to request favors which they confidently expect to be fulfilled by virtue of the saint's *baraka (*power*)*. Numerous and varied miracles are known to have taken place, and the types of miracles which they have performed over the centuries are similar in nature. It is a well-known *Sufi* phenomenon that a *Sufi* saint's power remains at his tomb, so the saying goes that he never dies. Sai Baba's *urs* celebration was established well before his physical death and his shrine (now known as the Samadhi Mandir) has been frequented since his demise. People continue to report that they have received posthumous help 'from the tomb' as he promised. Sai Baba's healing abilities in many ways mirrored those of his predecessors. He was known to have cured common illnesses and afflictions, healing a boy with the plague and saving the whole village from a cholera epidemic. He was especially renowned for his ability to cure barrenness. Besides these healing powers, Sai Baba was known to have performed many other miracles typical of the Maharashtrian saints, such as making water potable, multiplying food so that a small amount could feed a large number, putting out fire at a distance, clairvoyantly locating lost animals and objects and so forth. The Maharashtrian Muslim saints are also known to have had the power to telepathically communicate between themselves, and with other saints, and thus were able to assist each other and guide their initiates to each other. There are many instances recorded where Sai Baba assisted, or was assisted, by various contemporary saints. Sai Baba is thus situated in a long well-accepted Maharashtrian tradition of saints, who have acquired miraculous and superhuman powers, with which they serve the local community.

Most of these nineteenth-century *Sufi* saints in Maharashtra cannot be linked with any particular *Sufi* master or Order. Most were itinerant and in their later years settled on the fringe of a community, and after their demise, their *dargahs* became important pilgrimage sites. Like Sai Baba, none of these contempory *Sufi* saints left any writings, and as a result whatever we know of them today is what has been recorded by others. The evidence from this and the previous chapter will illustrate that Sai Baba emerged from the dual Maharashtrian *Bhakti* and *Sufi* traditions whose goal was to directly experience God, and both these traditions were characterized by certain common elements: monism where reality is seen as a unified whole; intense devotion; constant remembrance of the name of God; and ascetic renunciation.

When all the external references and correspondences are collected they make a formidable case for the fact that Sai Baba, in his early years, was steeped in the *Sufi* tradition and community of the Deccan. It was only late in Sai Baba's life with the influx of Hindus mostly from Bombay, many of whom were highly educated and literate and who wrote about Sai Baba in the light of their own tradition, that the issue became clouded. This aspect - the Hindu interpretation of Sai Baba - is the topic for Part III. Part II will examine Sai Baba's words and actions from an interior point of view, showing their close correspondences with the *Sufi* teaching on the *maqamat* and *ahwal*, the way-stations and states that comprise the *Sufi tariqat*. As introduced earlier, Abdul, Sai Baba's *faqir* disciple and servant, would sit with Sai Baba and read the *Qur'an*, and later he would jot down in Urdu script the gist of what Sai Baba had said. This notebook has survived, and his brief notes have been translated into English and given the title the '*Saibaba MS*'. The translation of this manuscript is presented in full in Part II, and its implications discussed.

NOTES

1. *Census of India 1961*, "Fairs and Festivals in Maharashtra", pp. 67-227.
2. Joshi, *Origin and Development of Dattatreya Worship in India. The Census of India, 1961*, "Fairs and Festivals in Maharashtra" lists all the shrines, *dargahs*, and their festival times.
3. DE, p. 210.
4. LSB, IV: 103.
5. DE, p. 210.
6. LSB, IV:103.
7. *Hazrat Baba Tajuddin - Noor-E-Mubeen: The Divine Light of Allah* (Karachi: Bazm-E-Tajul Aulai, 1990), pp. 27-38.
8. Khaparde, *Shirdi Diary*, p. 131.
9. DE, p. 163.
10. Meher Baba and A.G. Munsiff, *Hazrat Babajan: The Emperor of Spiritual Realm of Her Time* (Poona: Meher Era Publications, 1981), pp. 34-5.
11. Meher Baba and Munsiff, *Hazrat Babajan*, pp. 50-62.
12. Meher Baba and Munsiff, *Hazrat Babajan*, p. 51.
13. SSG, p. 42.
14. SSG, p. 23.
15. Meher Baba and Munsiff, *Hazrat Babajan*, p. 61.
16. As mentioned elsewhere this 1886 experience was crucial in the life of Sai Baba for it constituted his experience of God-realization.

Part II

Sai Baba and the Sufi Path - the Tariqat

CHAPTER NINE

Sai Baba and the Sufi Tariqat (Path)

In the *Saibaba MS* it says, 'He who has not seen the pathway to *Allah* remains blind in the world - then he wanders like a blind man among people. He is not able to see God.'[1] Here Sai Baba is almost certainly referring to the *Sufi tariqat,* which outlines a progressive development of spiritual practices leading to the transformation of the self. Mystics of all traditions who have reached the ultimate goal, wishing to guide others to the same end, inevitably take recourse to the image of a journey, describing a 'path' or 'way' leading to the divine insight or realization of God which is termed *ma'rifat* in the *Sufi* tradition. Since the eighth century AD, the *Sufis* had been developing and refining this sophisticated pathway to God, where veils of ignorance are said to be stripped away, and the aspirant experiences God directly and is, therefore, no longer spiritually blind. Sai Baba, speaking further on the topic of God-realization, goes on to elucidate, as recorded by Abdul:

> Maulana Rumi says, only a person who has tasted *misry* (sugar) or those whose tongue has the power to taste sweetness, will know the quality of sweetness. Those who have not tasted or who have lost their power of taste, will not know. To him there will be no difference between wax and honey! In the same way Maulana Rumi means that those who do not have a taste for *irfan* or spiritual knowledge, how would they know the eminence of the *awliya*, appreciate their hierarchy, or recognize those born as Paigambars or Great Divines?. To him these people will appear just like himself, but in fact there is as much distinction between earth and sky as between himself and the saints and prophets.[2]

God-realization or experiencing a direct intuitive first-hand apprehension of God was the most important goal of Sai Baba's teaching. While he would often grant devotees' worldly desires of daily life, it was with the express purpose of eventually getting them to want what he had to give - namely this transcendental experience of God. This is what he is referring to in his explanation, quoted above, when he speaks of mystic knowledge or *irfan*. He further said, "those who have not had divine insight can never have self-realization".[3] From these statements Sai Baba reveals that he has full knowledge and familiarity with the classical *Sufi tariqat* with its structured path of *maqamat* or way-stations and its *ahwal* or states. The word *maqamat* originally referred to the stopping places of the caravans in the desert in olden days, and then in time came to mean the stages or stations used to mark the progress that each individual *Sufi* aspirant had attained on the mystical path. These stages constitute the various ascetic and ethical disciplines of the *Sufi*, and the attainment of each station thus signals the uplift of the personality to a more integrated level.

The first *Sufi* to enumerate the way-stations through which the soul progresses to union with God, was Shaqiq al-Balkhi around the end of the eighth century, and he listed four stations - asceticism, fear, longing and love. By the tenth century Abu Nasr al-Sarraj ennumerated seven, and the Egyptian Dhu al-Nun raised the number to eighteen. By the eleventh century, two eminent Sufis living around the same time, were in the forefront of establishing *Sufi* lore - Abu al-Qasim Qushayri, 'Abd Allah Ansari. Qushayri in his famous *Principles of Sufism* listed fifty spiritual stations, while Ansari in his *Way Stations of the Travelers* listed one hundred. By the thirteenth century Ruzbihan Baqli had listed a thousand and one. While the number and order of *maqamat* and *ahwal* obviously vary according to the personal experience of each *Sufi pir* or *sheikh* in the past, popular tradition now ennumerates seven major stations. At each of these seven, 10,000 veils are said to be lifted. *Allah* is said to be veiled by seventy thousand veils which hide from the aspirant his true spiritual identity, and these have to be unveiled through spiritual practices. According to Subhan,

> The soul in its journey to union with Deity, passes through seven stages and at every stage is stripped of ten thousand of these veils, the dark ones first then the bright. At the final stage, the soul stripped of all sensual and material qualities stands face to face with the Absolute Being.[4]

According to al-Hujwiri, the attainment of a station or *maqam* denotes a person's 'standing' with God, attesting to his fulfillment of the obligations appertaining to that station. Although they are much more structured, the *maqamat* have some similarities with Hindu spiritual practices known as *sadhana*, and involve strenuous effort and action undertaken with pure motives on the part of the aspirant, in order to attain God-realization. Hand in hand with the stations are 'states', known as *ahwal*, but unlike the stations they cannot be earned with effort, being the gift of God. A *hal* (sing. of *ahwal*) is also explained as a mystical feeling of the heart which has been described as a passing immersion of the soul in the Divine Light. Al-Hujwiri further says that a *hal,* 'descends from God into a man's heart, without his being able to repel it when it comes, or attract it when it goes, by his own effort....which is not connected to any mortification on the latter's part.'[5] Thus the *ahwal* can be mystical feelings, emotions, sensations or qualities such as sadness, awe, or bliss which spontaneously come upon a mystic without his invoking them. They cannot be generalised as they occur on an individual basis. Each rung, therefore, represents a station through which the aspirant will pass, at which time he is said to experience certain feelings or emotional dispositions. A station is attained when the associated qualities have become stable and permanent in the mental consciousness of the aspirant.[6] While no two *Sufis*' experience is identical, there is a core of mystical experience that is shared, and this common experience forms the basis for the metaphorical guide-book which is the *tariqat.*

The quotations from the *Saibaba MS*, noted at the beginning, suggest that Sai Baba had himself 'tasted' the sweetness of God-realization, having first had experience of traversing the path, followed by the overwhelming conviction of his own innate divinity. In the following delineation of the seven stations of the *tariqat* given by Al-Sarraj of: *tawbat* - repentance, *wara* - abstinence, *zuhd* - renunciation, *faqr* - poverty, *sabr* - patience, *tawakkul* - faith or trust in God, and *rida* - contentment, some of Sai Baba's experiences from his early life are described as those of one traversing the path, and all the later statements from him are seen as those of an enlightened Master. In this chapter the person, life and sayings of Sai Baba will be examined in the light of the stations and 'states' of the *Sufi tariqat*.

The *Sufi Maqamat* - Seven Stations on the Path

Tawbat or Repentance

The first station or *maqam* on the *Sufi* path is repentance or conversion, termed *tawbat*, through which the aspirant is spiritually 'reawakened' to his true identity with God. Conversion may be taught or initiated spontaneously by a dream, vision or supranormal experience, which causes the individual's sudden transformation - shocking him into re-evaluating his life and making a fresh start. He feels contrition for past sins, and regret for any evil caused. 'Repent to God with unswerving repentance', says the *Qur'an.*[7] Ibn Abbas clarifies this statement saying, 'unswerving repentance is remorse in the heart, asking forgiveness with the tongue, abstention with the body, and resolution not to revert.'[8] It requires the adept to question his values, his reason for being, and the very meaning of life. He must recognize the transitoriness of the world of matter and discover the true value of spirituality. There are instances in all religious traditions where individuals are 'converted' by some incident, from which time they renounce their existing lifestyle in order to seek God. Jalaluddin Rumi, who was to become one of the greatest of all *Sufis*, underwent such a transformation when he met Shams of Tabriz. As a prominent scholar, Rumi occupied an enviable academic position in society, but he suddenly abandoned everything in order to devote himself to the *Sufi* path. He succeeded in demonstrating the superiority of Sufism to the theological and intellectual approaches of his day by giving an answer to the meaning of life, and the mystic order he founded greatly influenced Middle Eastern thought thereafter.[9] A example of sudden conversion occurs within the Sai literature itself, in the life of Narasimhaswami, who abandoned his householder lifestyle after the tragic drowning death of his children, in order to seek God. Many people, however, have to be taught or cajoled into repentance, and the *Sufis* identify four levels of repentance by abstention from - *kofr* (unbelief); *fojur* (lewdness); immoral traits; and finally from everything other than God. Sharafuddin Maneri describes the transforming effects of repentance and mentions one of the techniques for it:

> The reality of repentance requires a radical shift in one's basic nature. Whoever commands a novice to undergo a forty-day retreat commands it for the sake of this change, in order that his very nature might be transformed. When he has been fully converted, he becomes another person, not in the sense that a different man appears in front of you but, since his qualities have changed, he too has changed. His essence remains the same yet it hardly matters, for now a completely different faith, a real faith, appears in him.[10]

Sufi training, particularly in the Chishtiyya Order, often included such a forty-day retreat termed a *chillah*, like the one mentioned above, and it was considered to be an important technique in the mystical training given by a Master or *pir* to his pupil or *murid*. The aspirant was to undertake a forty-day period of seclusion spent in fasting, meditation, recollection and devotional exercises to purify the soul. Each *pir* would have his own method of initiating this spiritual experience, and would assist in finding a suitable secluded place or special dark space.

A variation of this normal *chillah* is the *chilla-i-ma'kusa* in which the aspirant is suspended in an inverted position while performing secluded prayers and meditation. The idea of an 'inverted *chillah*' is very old, having existed among *Sufis* of eastern Iran long before Sufism spread to India. The technique consisted of being hung upside down in a lonely place such as a well, for a number of hours a day - over a period of days or even the full forty days of the regular *chillah*. When the *pir* thought the *salik* was spiritually prepared, he would confer an experience of bliss through his own spiritual power known as *baraka*. This feat was considered to be one of the most challenging in *Sufi* asceticism. In the classical period of Sufism, the *Sufi* with whom this *chilla-i-ma'kusa* is most associated is the thirteenth-century Chishti Sheikh Fariduddin Ganj-shakar of Pakpattan, more familiarly known as Baba Farid, who lived from 1173-1265 AD. According to legend it was his preceptor Khwaja Qutbuddin who ordered Baba Farid to undertake the exercise of a *chilla-i-ma'kusa*, and it marked the peak of his self-discipline, from which he reportedly attained great spiritual powers.[11]

Sai Baba may have undergone an experience very similar to that of Baba Farid. It is recorded in the *Sri Sai Saccarita* that Sai Baba once told of his own experience of an inverted exercise conducted by his *pir/guru*. He relates how as a young man he and three friends were discussing how to attain God-realization while wandering in the forest. His *guru* came along and said that he himself would show Sai Baba that for which he was seeking, namely an experience of God. Sai Baba said:

> Then he took me to a well, tied my feet with a rope and hung me - head downwards and feet up - from a tree near the well. I was suspended three feet above the water, which I could not reach with my hands, nor which could go into my mouth. Suspending me in this manner he went away, no one knew where. After 10-12 *ghatakas* (4 or 5 hours) he returned and taking me out quickly asked me how I fared. "In bliss supreme, I was. How can a fool like me describe the joy I experienced?", I replied. Hearing my answer my *Guru* was much pleased with me....[12]

From the detail of the physical events described by Sai Baba, it is obvious that he is narrating a personal experience which is virtually identical with the traditional *Sufi* technique, although in his case the time period was much shorter.[13] Sai Baba underwent some form of transformation, for he continues, "There I forgot my parents, all my attachment was snapped, and I was liberated easily."[14] Sai Baba is describing a conversion experience which is well-defined as *tawbat* in the *Sufi* path. His life changed thereafter, for he then relates how he at once joined the *guru/pir*'s school, which we can now interpret as a *Sufi* school, known as a *madrasah,* where he was trained. The official biographers, however, treat this crucial event as a parable or as merely symbolic, due to their ignorance of the significance of *tawbat* in the *Sufi tariqat*. Arthur Osborne gives an elaborate justification for this story, saying:

> This is a typical Sai Baba account because the whole story is symbolical. The forest is the jungle of the mind in which the quest for Truth takes place, and the four friends are four modes of approach. The labourer is the Guru and the food he offers is his Grace. 'The Guru appeared' means that after the youth has accepted the food he discovers that the giver of it really is the divine Guru. Therefore he bows reverently, that is accepts his authority. Tying him head downwards over a well is overturning the ego, binding it and holding it within sight of the cool waters of Peace. (Incidentally, this mode of discipline has been used physically by some Masters). It is because of this that the ordeal is blissful; it is suffering beatified by the end for which it is endured. This absorption in the Guru is the sadhana or Path followed and the final 'in silence I bowed down' is the extinction of the ego in Realization.[15]

Gunaji, in similar vein, ironically states in a footnote that 'this [story] should not be taken too literally; for no one can be at ease and feel bliss if he be suspended with a rope - head down and feet up - in a well for hours together.'[16] He totally missed the point.

In his later role as a *Sufi* Master Sai Baba encouraged his visitors to practice repentance, to turn away from the life they had been living, and to practice devotion to God in whatever form they chose. He admonished his devotees to give up bad habits such as addiction to liquor,[17] and exhorted that negative qualities such as caste rivalry, pride of learning, greed, etc. should not be harboured. In answer to a devotee's question concerning *samsara* (worldly activities), Sai Baba observed:

> The *shadripus* (the six enemies - lust, anger, covetousness, delusion, pride and jealousy) are all delusive. They make the unreal appear as real. If a rich man wears a gold ornament, the poor man gets jealous, and thinks he must have one. This is *lobha* (greed). All are like this. So one must conquer the six enemies. If they are conquered, waves of passion will not arise. Else they will enslave you. If they are subordinated and reason made the commandant, then the delusive pleasures and pains will no longer hold sway over you.[18]

Commenting to Nana Chandorkar, he said that of these jealousy is the easiest to conquer:

> Jealousy (*matsara*) is the inability to endure another's profit and prosperity. If another gets fortune or power, we cannot put up with it, we scandalise him. When he meets with loss, we rejoice. But is this good? When that man attains prosperity, what loss have we really suffered? But people do not consider this point of view. If he attains good let us rejoice; let us attain or strive to attain equal good. That should be our desire and determination.[19]

One technique which Sai Baba enjoined for overcoming such negative experiences was to repeat the name of God. He said: "if others hate us, let us simply take to *namajapa* [recitation of the names of God] and avoid them."[20] As part of the process of repentance or return to God, Sai Baba also recommended the reading of sacred texts known in Marathi as *pothi,* and in some cases the reading of the text in a set number of days known as a *parayana,* suitable to the individual's Hindu or Muslim background. To Hindus he would suggest books such as the *Jnanesvari*, the *Shree Guru Caritra*, the *Eknathi Bhagavata*, the

Dasa Bodha, the *Yoga Vasisthta* and the *Adhyatma Ramayana*. To Upasani Maharaj, a Hindu pandit, he gave a copy of the *Panchadasi* saying: "This is our [your] treasury."[21] To Muslim devotees such as Bade Baba, he urged the reading of the *Qur'an*, and daily explained some verses to Abdul, his *Sufi* attendant. The fact that devotees or visitors had the desire to seek out Sai Baba as a holy man and spiritual guide, making the effort to go to Shirdi - not an easy trip in those days - meant that they had taken that first step of *tawbat*. He would then fulfil their most urgent need or request and send them away with admonitions to abjure from certain bad actions, pray to God, read sacred scripture, or perform *pujas*. Sai Baba's concern was to raise the individual to a higher level of spiritual consciousness. If it meant granting desires or healing illness in order to achieve this, he would perform the necessary miracles, known in Islam as *karamat*, to achieve this end.

The story of how Das Ganu was drawn to the service of Sai Baba, and subsequently became one of his most ardent apostles, illustrates Sai Baba's power and way of inducing repentance. Das Ganu was a constable with the police force in the Bombay Presidency, and in his spare time he liked to take part in village dramas, taking female parts, dressing in women's clothes, and dancing and singing lewd songs which he composed himself.[22] He came to Shirdi a few times as an orderly attached to Nana Chandorkar, but he had neither interest in saints nor in Sai Baba; he merely obeyed Nana Chandorkar's instructions to attend Sai Baba's *darshan*. This stage can be equated with the *Sufi* stage of *kofr* or unbelief, when he was quite happy in his ignorance, and did not want to believe in God or in saints. Sai Baba began by requesting him to give up composing *tamasas*, the titillating songs and dialogues for village folk-dramas, and put his skill to writing devotional songs, especially *kirtans* extolling the lives of saints. Das Ganu eventually complied, but only after a long time and after much persuasion. Sai Baba also requested him to give up police work as it was very corrupting. Narasimhaswami details Das Ganu's long struggle to retain the rank and powers of a policeman, and his eventual decision to relinquish them. Sai Baba was weaning him through stages two and three (giving up lewdness and immoral traits) towards full repentance. Over the next fifty years Das Ganu gradually came to recognise the power of God through the numerous miracles that Sai Baba showed him, finally becoming an ardent devotee of God and of Sai Baba, thus fulfilling the fourth stage.[23] He became a successful singer of devotional songs called in Maharashtra a *kirtankar*, and was responsible for thousands of people hearing about Sai Baba and for their visiting Shirdi, during Sai Baba's lifetime, and continuing long after the saint's *mahasamadhi.*

Wara or Abstinence

The second station on the path is abstinence, termed *wara*, which refers to abstinence from anything that 'distracts the heart from God'. According to the *Sufi* poet, Jami: 'To become a stranger to everything other than Thou is abstinence, the rest, a tale'.[24] Abstinence is the beginning of renunciation, and the method according to Bishr al-Hafi (known as the bare-footed *Sufi*) is 'to come out from any doubtful thing and to examine one's soul at every instant'.[25] Many things are forbidden in Islam including drinking alcohol, eating pork, adultery, stealing, lying, dishonesty, deception, malicious gossip, unjust behaviour and usury. The *Sufi* aspirant had in addition to avoid over indulgence in food, sleep and excessive or illicit sexual activity, although total celibacy was not obligatory. Al-Sarraj identified three levels of abstinence. The first is to abstain from what is 'dubious', especially the gross material abstentions just enumerated. The second is to abstain from 'whatever their consciences bid them avoid', especially anything not sanctioned by the heart. The third is to abstain from 'whatever diverts the attention from God.'[26] The concept is that a heart filled with desires leaves no room for God. Conversely, a heart filled with God has no room for worldly desires.

Sai Baba's whole life was singularly devoted to God, and it is apparent that before any action was taken by him it was scrutinized to conform not only to his conscience but also as to whether it would detract from his full focus on God. On a number of occasions it is reported that he consulted 'The Faqir' before making decisions, 'The Faqir', with a capital F, being Sai Baba's name for God. Once when Sai Baba was asking for *daksina* or money gifts, a devotee asked him why he was asking for so much money. Sai Baba replied, "I am not asking of everyone. I ask only from the man whom the Faqir points out. But in exchange, I have to give ten times that amount which I have taken. I do not take the money for my own use. I have no family."[27]

Abstinence of food or fasting is important at all stages on the *Sufi* path. Al-Hujwiri avers, 'Fasting is really abstinence and this includes the whole method of Sufism.'[28] Fasting is used as a discipline for the novice. It is believed that divine intuition can only be received when the *Sufi* keeps himself hungry and empty. Fasting is therefore a key technique, the 'alchemy of hunger' - an empty stomach being a prerequisite for enlightenment. Opinions on the value of hunger and fasting differed widely between individual *Sufis* and different *Sufi* Orders; some promoted exaggerated periods of fasting, some almost to death; others acknowledged that hunger is only a means to spiritual progress, not the goal. Fasting was used as a tool to subdue the baser instincts of man, termed *nafs*. More recent *Sufi* Orders such as the Naqshbandiyya, taught moderation in eating, agreeing that 'to eat little' is preferable to excess.

Sai Baba, as reported in the *Sri Sai Saccarita*, had strong opinions on fasting:

> Baba never fasted Himself, nor did he allow others to do so. The mind of the faster is never at ease, then how could he attain his *Paramartha* (goal of life)? God is not attained on an empty stomach...Neither fasting nor overeating is good. Moderation in diet is really wholesome both to the body and mind.[29]

Although seeming to reject the earlier *Sufi* stance on fasting, being more in agreement with later *Sufi* Orders advocating a more moderate approach, his statement has to be approached cautiously. Sai Baba was recognized as a fully realised Master, a state in which an individual has transcended the need to perform austerities. In his early life when apparently following the stages of the *tariqat*, Sai Baba faithfully adhered to most of the ascetic practices advocated by the *Sufis*. From the hints we can glean from this period, it appears that regular meals were not a high priority with him when he first came to Shirdi, for he had no fixed abode and slept under a *neem* tree. He had no means of obtaining food other than by begging, and as he practiced long hours of meditation in the jungle he may have gone for days without eating. It is known that Bayajabai, a Shirdi housewife, had made a vow not to eat until she had given food to Sai Baba, and she often packed some food and then roamed for miles looking for him in the jungle.[30] However, the audience to whom Sai Baba addressed his above-quoted remarks were householders with jobs and families, not *faqirs* whose lives were specifically dedicated to attaining God-realization. But, to his *faqiri* servant Abdul who already lived as a renunciate, and for whom Sai Baba was his *murshid*, his advice was: "Eat little. Do not go in for a variety of eatables. A single sort [dish] will suffice".[31] Similarly, Sai Baba's treatment (including restricting food) of Kasinath Upasani was far stricter than that of regular Hindu devotees, as he had vowed to raise his spiritual consciousness.[32] On one occasion, a *Sufi* named Sheikh Abdulla came to visit Sai Baba seeking advice as to how he could further his spiritual progress. Sai Baba told him that it was his attachment to home and family that was blocking his progress. Sheikh Abdulla immediately obeyed the advice given and left home, and during his wanderings as a total renunciate attained great powers.[33] However, this advice was particular to an advanced spiritual *salik*, and similarly the statement in the *Saibaba MS* is also for advanced aspirants, when he says, "In order to reach a higher stage of spirituality [God-realization], it is necessary to practice severe renunciation and celibacy. That means he should be awake day and night, stay away from women, abjure from delicious food and reside in jungles and mountains".

Sufism never imposed celibacy on its adherents, although women were recognised to be a possible distraction away from the spiritual path. Sai Baba's lifelong celibacy was self-imposed, and he treated every woman as either his mother or sister. Nowhere is his name romantically linked with any woman in the texts or hinted at by devotees. In G.G.Narke's remembrances of Sai Baba, he describes him as an *aksalita brahmacarya*, and remarks that Sai Baba kept women at a distance and that very few women were allowed to massage his legs, and then up to the knee only.[34] Sai Baba's views on women are illustrated when two Muslim women wearing veils came to visit him. Nana Chandorkar was sitting close and caught sight of the unveiled face of one of them. Sensing Chandorkar's admiration of the lady's beauty, Sai Baba then spoke on how a spiritual aspirant must view sensual and sexual situations:

> You are a man after all. Are you not? The body is full of desires, which spring up as soon as a sense object approaches, but are temples with lovely and well-coloured exterior scarce in the world? When we go there, is it to admire the exterior or see the God within? When you are seeing God in the shrine, do you care for the beauty of the building or for that of the image of the Paramatma within?...Of course there is nothing wrong with looking at the exterior, but as one looks at it, he must think how clever and powerful is the God that produced such a beautiful abode, how he resides therein and how nicely ornamented he is. Nana, if you had directed your thoughts in this way, you would not have had the desire to get one more look at the Moslem beauty's face. Keep this always in mind.[35]

For his householder devotees and visitors Sai Baba fully endorsed marriage and family, even telling certain devotees to get married. He told Kusa Bhav: "When you come next, come two of you", in other words get married and then visit Shirdi.[36] Even Abdul, although a *faqir,* married and had children and today his grandchildren and great grand-children are still living in Shirdi. Sai Baba thus advocated moderation rather than complete abstinence for householders, while for *faqirs* his advice was specifically tailored to the individual's level of spiritual progress.

Zudh or Asceticism

The third station of the *Sufi maqamat* is asceticism known as *zuhd*, which embraces the notions of renunciation and austerity. All require the rejection of the material world in favour of the spiritual, and finally even the hope of heavenly rewards has also to be renounced. Al-Sarraj declares in his work *Kitab al-luma' fi't-tasawwuf*, 'renunciation is the basis of spiritual progress, because every sin originates with love of the world, and every act of goodness and obedience springs from renunciation.'[37] Therefore, renunciation is demonstrated through one's actions, not by words. According to Sari as-Saqati:

> Renunciation is to refrain from all the gratifications of the *nafs* [base instincts] found in this world. The renouncer does not become happy through anything within this world, nor does he become sad at losing anything of it. He takes nothing from it except that which helps him obey his Lord or that which he is commanded to take, while he occupies himself continually with remembrance, meditation and reflection about the next world. This is the highest state of renunciation. When someone reaches this degree, his person is in this world, but his spiritual reality is with God through meditation and witnessing, and he does not become separate from God.[38]

While accepting the truth of the perfection of the soul, the average man is said to be hindered by a veil of impurities. These impurities arise from the *nafs*, an Arabic word, variously translated as man's base instincts, his carnal soul or lower nature. They render his own perfection and his intimate relationship to God invisible to himself, so they are classed with all the phenomena of the external world which seduce the *Sufi* away from the realization of God. The first four stations or *maqamat* on the journey to God are particularly concerned with the purification of the self and a *Sufi's* whole progress depends upon his being able to detach himself from his lower self or carnal self, which is the cause of all sensual and worldly temptations. This idea is taken directly from the *Qur'an* for it promises paradise to those who 'hinder the *nafs* from lust',[39] or in its softer translation, 'forbade the soul its caprice.'[40] One's pure self has to be unveiled from one's base instincts beginning with ascetic practices. The *Sufi* promise is that when inner purification is fully achieved, it will be rewarded with spiritual illumination and a revelation of the Godhead known as *ilahiyyat*.

The life of Sai Baba reads like a manual on renunciation, with his total unconcern for the external world and creature comforts of this life. During Sai Baba's first advent in Shirdi he was seen sitting in the manner of a wandering *darvish* or *sa'ih* under a *neem* tree. Dabholkar notes that, 'the people were wonder-struck to see such a young lad practicing hard penance, not minding heat or cold. By day he associated with none, by night he was afraid of nobody.'[41] The practice of making the base of a tree, particularly a *neem* tree, a temporary resting place, is a typical *Sufi* mode of behaviour for an itinerant *faqir* who has renounced the comforts of a fixed home or permanent protection from the elements. It has already been noted that Sai Baba's contemporaries, Hazrat Babajan and Tajuddin Baba both made their home under trees. According to an old devotee, Sai Baba lived first under a *babul* tree, and later spent four or five years under a *neem* tree,[42] and only after much persuasion moved to a more permanent home in an old *masjid*. Even there however, one whole wall was missing so that there was little protection from the rain and cold. Sai Baba, unconcerned, lived like this for decades until 1897 when Gopal Gund, a staunch devotee, decided to repair the *masjid* for him. Although at first Sai Baba rejected the repairs, his devotees finally convinced him to allow the walls to be rebuilt and a pavement to be laid. At a later date Kakasaheb Dixit wanted to enlarge the area by building a roof over the courtyard. Procuring iron posts and other necessities at great expense, he began to erect the structure secretly at night, but the next morning on seeing it, Sai Baba flew into a rage and uprooted the structure. Only when he was persuaded that whatever was planned would benefit the devotees and visitors as much as himself, would he agree to the expansion.[43]

As part of his ascetic lifestyle, Sai Baba originally slept on the earthen floor of the *masjid* on a rough piece of sacking. There is one incident related twice in the *Sri Sai Saccarita*, which simultaneously illustrates his degree of renunciation and his ability to perform miracles. The story tells how, at a later date, Sai Baba slept on a wooden plank which was given to him. The plank was described as 'four arms length and one span wide' which Sai Baba suspended like a swing from the rafters only using old rags. He placed small earthenware oil lamps at each corner. All agree it was a miracle for not only was it 'impossible' for the rags to hold the weight of a heavy large-boned man such as Sai Baba, but it was far too narrow for a normal person to sleep on as he would have fallen off, and furthermore it was too high to climb up to. Each night, nonetheless, he was observed to be up there sleeping, although no one ever saw him get either up or down. Explaining this difficult feat, he said, "It is not easy to sleep up on the plank. He, who has many good qualities in him, only can do so. He who can sleep 'with his eyes open' can effect that."[44] This suggests that Sai Baba had also conquered the need for sleep. Shyama, a school-teacher in Shirdi in the early years whose quarters were near the *masjid*, records that late into the night he could hear Sai Baba talking.[45] In later years Tatya Patil and Mhalsapati slept in the same room with Sai Baba, and reported that sometimes Sai Baba would keep them talking all night.

Traditionally the *Sufi* is known for his night-long prayer vigils, his upright position for sleep, and his frequent fasts, which all are ascetic methods for taming, subduing and training the *nafs*. Shaykh Abu Sa'id listed eighteen austerities whereby, in addition to those mentioned, he recited the *Qur'an* every 24 hours, sat in the mosque facing the Ka'ba, was resigned to God's Will, practised recollection, did not look at women, and practised silence.[46] The *nafs* are perceived by the *Sufi* mystics to be real in some sense, a carnal body with form and substance, and capable of being seen apart from the body. Being equated with animal instincts, the *nafs* became easy to visualise as animals such as a black dog or, as al-Hujwiri described them, as a mouse or young fox coming from the throat. The *nafs* will assume any form or adopt any ruse, in order to cajole the individual away from God, so similes to mules, camels, pigs and snakes are legendary in *Sufi* literature. The *nafs* have also been likened to a woman whose ruses seduce men back to worldly life. The Prophet Muhammad described the *nafs* as his *shaytan*, which could be trained to obey its master. Muhasibi, on the other hand, saw them in terms of possessing a life, or body, and urges the aspirant to:

> ...get the better of it, for whether it be your servant, it is from Satan, or whether it overpowers you, Satan is within it....When you hope to be quit of it, it will strengthen itself, and if you neglect to examine it, you will fall under its control, and if you weaken in your struggles against it, you will be overwhelmed, and if you follow it in its desires, you will go down into Hell.[47]

An incident in the life of Kasinath Upasani, a devotee of Sai Baba, becomes instantly more understandable when viewed in the light of the *Sufi* teaching on the *nafs*. The story goes that Sai Baba had an obligation from a previous life, known as *rinanubanda*, to transform the worldly-minded Kasinath Upasani into a saint known in Hindu terminology as a *samartha sadguru*, as Kasinath had once saved his life. In order to do this it was essential to annihilate Kasinath's *nafs* or carnal being. He initiated this by inducing a series of visions, one of which invoked the visualization of the *nafs* as a dark body or his *shaytan*. Narasimhaswami records the story of Kasinath's vision thus:

> Baba asked him to come near saying, "I am going to give you *upadesh*." When Kasinath was trying to approach the *Guru*, a dark and dirty person behind Kasinath exactly like him, that is, his replica pulled him up and said, "Don't listen to the *Guru*, but listen to me." Twice this interruption took place. Then Sai got up, seized that dark person behind Kasinath, took him and placed him on a

> pile of faggots and burnt him. All that time Kasinath was saying, "Baba, it is me whom you are burning, it is me whom you are burning." After completely burning him out, Baba turned to Kasinath and said, "Yes, that was you no doubt. But you were in that sin form, namely *papa rupa*. I have destroyed him. You are now free from sin. By our united efforts there are many things to be achieved in the future. How can that be done if sin remains?"[48]

The notion of the *Sufi nafs* or lower self and the Hindu *papa rupa* or sin body are very similar constructs. This story was told directly to Narasimhaswami by Upasani Maharaj himself, but both these men were Hindu, so that it is not surprising that Narasimhaswami relates this event in the language of his own Hindu training, calling this vision *papa purusa nirasana* or the destruction of the sin body. The concept of sin and the whole idea of a sin body is not a widely used image in Hinduism, but the notion of sin known as *kabira* is integral to *Sufi* philosophy. Had this story been related to a Muslim biographer, no doubt it would have been retold using the *Sufi* terminology of the *nafs*.

The strong relationship between Sai Baba and his devotee Kasinath Upasani, now known more familiarly as Sri Upasani Maharaj, is mirrored in the close relationship that is said to exist between a *Sufi pir* and his *murid*, whereby through the practice of concentration upon the disciple known as *tawajjuh*, the *pir* is said to 'enter the door of the disciple's heart' in order to guide his progress.[49] In a similar way, Sai Baba could enter the vision of his devotee and operate on the subtle body in order to purify him. Evidently, this could not be accomplished instantaneously, but the process of transformation from the worldly Kasinath to saint could, according to Sai Baba, be accomplished over a period of four years.[50] Sai Baba insisted that Kasinath should remain close to him for this length of time, and follow his instructions, in order to transform him. Although Kasinath Upasani left Shirdi after only three years, he did in fact become famous as a *sadguru*, known as Sri Upasani Maharaj, during the 1930's after the demise of Sai Baba.

A little understood action of Sai Baba can now be understood in the light of the *Sufi* notion of *tawajjuh*, for daily when he was alone, he would take out some coins from his pouch, and would repeat the name of a devotee, saying this is Nana's, this is Kaka's etc. as he rubbed the surface of each coin.[51] Through this method he was concentrating on the devotee and 'entering the door of his heart' to uplift and guide him. Local devotees at the time felt that he must be eliminating obstacles or bad *karma* through this action. Although it is not recorded that Sai Baba ever used the word '*nafs*', he was, nevertheless, concerned to correct base instincts in devotees when he saw them. He warned against such lower qualities as lust, hatred, anger, greed, pride and jealousy, as a hindrance to spiritual life.[52] For example, there arrived at Shirdi one day a *hajji*, a Muslim who had made a pilgimage to Mecca. He was full of pride at having accomplished this pilgrimage or *hajj*, and bragged of his accomplishment, and expected full recognition and praise for his feat from Sai Baba. Sai Baba, perceiving that he had gained very little spiritually from his pilgrimage, ignored him for months. Only when Shyama interceded for him, did Sai Baba acknowledge him and angrily told him that the *Qur'an* did not sanction the sin of pride of pilgrimage. Thus, having taught him a lesson on pride, Sai Baba then softened, welcomed him to the *masjid* and showered love upon him, sending him a basket of fruits and some money as a token.[53]

Both Hindu and *Sufi* thought share the notion that man's soul is perfect and united with God, but has the appearance of separation. In Hindu thought man is said to be ignorant of the identity of his soul or *atman* with God called Brahman. In *Sufi* thought the soul is said to be hidden by impurities like so many veils. Sai Baba likened the veil to the intervening wall between his own *masjid* and the adjoining home of an oil-monger, who is known in Marathi as a *teli*. He said:

> People differentiate between themselves and others, their properties and others' properties. This is wrong, I am in you and you in me. This is the *teli's* wall that parts you

> from me; pull down this wall; and then we see each other clearly face to face.[54]

Faqr or Poverty

The fourth station on the *Sufi tariqat* is poverty known as *faqr*. The line between renunciation and poverty is very thin, but only after a *Sufi* assimilates the spirit of renunciation can he be said to progress to this fourth stage. At this point he has to disassociate himself from all desire for worldly possessions, the value of which must pale to him beside the spiritual treasure he has now come to realize is awaiting him. The philosophy behind the ideal of poverty is that the world enthrals and traps those who value its goods, blinding them to more subtle realities. It brings to mind the way they catch monkeys in the east. Food is placed in a narrow-necked jar, and when the monkey puts his paw in the jar and grasps a fist full of food, the paw becomes too big to withdraw from the jar. He has not the sense to let go of the food and so escape. The monkey is effectively caught by his own greed, which the *Sufis* use as a simile for those who are enthralled with the world and are effectively caught, refusing to let go of desires. As Al-Sarraj declares, 'the true *faqir* should not possess anything and thus not be possessed by anything.'[55]

Faqr - an Arabic word meaning poverty - is the root of the noun *faqir* meaning poor one, or mendicant. In this context *faqr* also embraces the idea of holy poverty or poverty undertaken for the specific purpose of eliminating attachments to worldly things which distract from the pursuit of God. Those practising *faqr* are considered to be genuine *Sufis*, for poverty has long been held as pivotal to God-realization. The twelfth century Shaykh Fariduddin 'Attar considered *faqr* to be the final station on the *Sufi tariqat*, for he believed that it is at this stage that the pilgrim experiences his true identity with God.[56] Burckhardt points out that the term '*al-faqr*' is commonly used to designate spirituality as a whole.[57] However, Jami, the author of one of the most widely read manuals on later Sufism[58], warns that the aspirant should not hold *faqr* as an end in itself but as one of the necessary stations on the path to God-realization.[59]

According to al-Sarraj, the people of Syria initially called the Islamic mystics *fuqara*, a term also derived from the root *faqr*, meaning poor men[60], and only later did *Sufi* become the more popular name for them. Their distinctive robe made of sheep's wool *(suf)* came to symbolize their unworldliness and devotion to God, hence the derivation of the name *Sufi*. Within Sufism, garments such as robes or headscarves are considered to have acquired some of the Master's *baraka* or power which could be transferred to the disciple at the Master's death. Garments therefore came to symbolize the transference of *Sufi* power, and the patched frock known as a *khirqa* which had been worn or touched by his spiritual guide would be awarded to the deserving disciple. When the *Sufis* entered India, the *faqirs* adopted a cooler garment made of cotton, called in Maharashtra a *kafni* or *kupni*, more suited to the Indian climate than the woollen robe. It symbolized a mark of detachment from the world, poverty, purity of soul and nearness to God. *Sufi* lore identifies three grades of *fuqara*: those who possess nothing, seek nothing and will refuse anything offered to them; those who possess nothing but will accept anything offered; and those fully detached from everything, yet feel free to ask for something. The third type have reached the ultimate mystical stage of distinguishing between their real and unreal self, and lack self-interest, so rank the highest.[61]

Sai Baba echoes the early classical *Sufi* view of poverty in his statement, saying: "Voluntary poverty is better than kingship and a thousand times superior to being rich. *Allah* is the brother of the poor. *Fakir* [sic] is the real emperor."[62] When a young man, it is recorded that Sai Baba dressed like an athlete,[63] wearing a green cap, green being the colour denoting the highest spirituality, and this headgear is evidently still preserved in the Shirdi *mandir*. However, after his wrestling match with Mohdin Tamboli he started to wear the typical *Sufi* garb of a knee-length shirt or *kafni*, and a cloth worn under the shirt and tied at the waist, called a *langot*. He also covered his head with a long white cloth with a large knot at the back, in the typical manner of a *Sufi*.[64]

According to some versions of the hagiography, Sai Baba was very attached to the piece of cloth which he wrapped around his head, because it was said to have been gifted to him by his *guru* or *pir* as a symbol of the *Sufi* transference of spiritual power. His *kafni* was often torn and in rags, and he would take a needle and thread and mend it himself. This is very reminiscent of the Persian *Sufi khirqa* or patched frock, which was literally pieces of cloth stitched together, and which itself had long been a symbol of spiritually-motivated poverty. It was very difficult for Sai Baba's devotees to persuade him to discard his *kafni* when it became old, ragged and dirty, and replace it with a new one, brought specially for him. This staunch adherence to his vow of poverty is reflected in many of the paintings of him, which portray him sitting in a soiled white *kafni* with a hole in the right sleeve. Sai Baba had very few personal possessions: a *danda* - stick; a *chilim* - clay pipe; a *tumrel* - tin pot; and *chappals* - sandals. There is a showcase in the Samadhi Mandir in Shirdi which displays the few personal items he possessed, although none has any great material value. He would not accept gifts except simple ones given with heart-felt love, and even those he gave away. Reading the minds and motives of visitors who came to his *mosque*, Sai Baba thereby knew when people brought rich gifts with the ulterior motive of 'buying' special favours. He would get extremely angry, refusing those gifts, and with a tirade of abuse refuse any help at all.[65] In his last few years wealthy devotees insisted on giving him silver pieces, such as an elaborate silver umbrella and a silver palanquin known in Maharashtra as a *palki* with silver accoutrements for the horses, for use in the nightly procession to the *chavadi* where Sai Baba slept, and also for the annual *Urs-Ramnavami* celebrations. Sai Baba's reaction was to refuse it, and in fact the *palki* on which Sai Baba's portrait was placed and processed around the village, was left out in the open on the first night after being gifted to him and a thief stole some silver pieces from it. Sai Baba merely wondered why the thief did not take the whole thing.[66] The *palki* was subsequently used annually for the ceremonies at the *Urs-Ramnavami* festival and for many decades afterwards at the anniversary of the saint's *mahasamadhi*.

We are told that Sai Baba begged for his food throughout his life, and that having been given liquid in his *tumrel* and having received dry items of food on a *zoli* or *choupadari* - a rectangular piece of cloth - he would then bring them back and mix everything together, and eat unconcerned about appearance or taste. Any remnants would be put in an earthenware pot and left in the *masjid* for the dogs, cats and crows.[67] There was certainly no need for him to beg in his later years, but Sai Baba preferred to give the money donations away, distribute any food gifts as *prasad* and then go to one of five customary houses in the village to beg for food. This routine he followed until a few days before he died.

As with many great *Sufi* saints, Sai Baba generally taught by example, but he did not necessarily advocate for his Hindu householder devotees, the strict path of poverty that he himself had undertaken. He recognised that they were at a very different level of spiritual development, so his advice on the topic of money and wealth was:

> Spend money in *dana* (charity) and *dharma* (piety) - but be not extravagant. The world perishes no doubt, but while it lasts, wealth is a real necessity, as bile is for the health. Be not obsessed by the importance of wealth. Do not be entangled in it, or be miserly. Be liberal and munificent - but not lavish or extravagant.[68]

To certain individuals it would appear that Sai Baba was initiating them onto the path of poverty when he asked for monetary gifts known as *daksina* - not once but many times - until the person had nothing left. After a while close devotees began to recognize that there was a great benefit in being asked for *daksina*, since Sai Baba would gave back tenfold what he took, and they accepted the truth of his statement: "I take away everything, when I wish to show my favour."[69] In this way he embodied the divine principle in relation to the *Sufi* tradition, giving back tenfold what had been donated to God. It was the experience of many devotees and visitors that when they got home the amount of rupees requested by Sai Baba as *daksina* exactly equalled a salary increase, indicated a promotion or denoted the exact amount of a pension award.[70] Far from promoting poverty, his devotees found the reverse - that they were comfortably provided for. Such a case was that of Somanath Deshpande who was asked for ten rupees as *daksina* by Sai Baba, and thought no more of it until six months later when his pay was increased by ten rupees per month, back-dated to the very date he gave *daksina*.[71] During his last decade, Sai Baba would start each morning as a penniless *faqir* with nothing; as the day progressed the wealthier he became from *daksina* contributions, often amounting daily to three hundred rupees or more. However, by the evening it would all be gifted away, leaving him penniless once more. Narasimhaswami comments that Sai Baba must have received the equivalent of a Governor's income from *daksina* - a fact which alerted the income-tax authorities - but they were powerless as it had all been gifted away by the end of the day.[72]

On the other hand, in his treatment of *Sufi faqirs*, and those Hindus who had made vows of renunciation he was much more severe. To Devadas, a young Hindu ascetic, Sai Baba stressed four points he should stringently follow: adhere to detachment; avoid women who are the great danger to an ascetic; avoid delusion and pomp; always think of God, and destroy the ego.[73] Although couched in a manner understandable to a Hindu renunciate, this advice is a summation of *Sufi* philosophy. Although Sai Baba gave money to many of his devotees, he never gave to those he was guiding along the path of renunciation, such as Mhalsapati and Abdul. These two he kept poor all their time in Shirdi, regularly omitting to give them even a 'dole' while other devotees such as Tatya Patil and Bade Baba became wealthy from his lavish gifts derived from the daily *daksina*. Seen in the light of the *Sufi tariqat*, Sai Baba's seemingly unequal and even unfair treatment of some of his devotees, becomes instantly more understandable.

Sai Baba personally practised the first four stations of the *Sufi tariqat* of repentance, abstinence, renunciation and poverty all his life. Even after he attained God-realization he continued to adhere to all the facets of these stations, while guiding others along the path in order to raise them to a higher level of transformation.

Sabr **- Patience**

The fifth station of the *Sufi* path is *sabr,* which translates as patience and the endurance of all adversities. Patience, together with an attitude of thanksgiving, is said to be the beginning of a devotee's full surrender to God.[74] The realization of God, for most individuals, is a long-term project requiring many years of effort. Al-Ghazali, in his work, *Ninety-nine Beautiful Names for Allah*, lists the final one as *As-Sabur* - The Patient One or 'One who times things perfectly'. The concept of pateience can be a hard discipline for both the layman who berates God when things do not happen the moment one sees fit, and for the adept who despairs when realization seems slow in coming. The attitude to be cultivated, according to Al-Ghazali, should be one of complete confidence that, after surrendering oneself to *Allah*, 'He brings about everything in its proper time, in the manner that is necessary that it be just as it ought to be.'[75] According to Ibn Salim, there are three grades of patience in the development of a *Sufi*: one who attempts to be patient, termed *mutasabbir*; one who is patient under afflictions, termed *sabir*; and one who is perfectly patient at all times, termed *sabur.*[76] 'It is only by *saburi* [patience] that one can attain God', affirmed Kabir in one of his *dohas* (verses).[77]

Sai Baba was constantly stressing the importance of two qualities - *nista* and *saburi* (faith and patience) - for his devotees. *Saburi* is a *Sufi* term actually used by Sai Baba, and Narasimhaswami defines it as patience and perseverance with cheerfulness, and showed what the saint meant with the following story. An impatient man called Uddhavesa Bua came to visit Sai Baba seeking a *guru* who would personally lead him to *moksa* or liberation. Sai Baba advised patience, telling him to wait and that he would know after five years. Referring to the man's spiritual growth in the enigmatic language of the mystic, Sai Baba declared: "How can you swallow at one gulp an entire loaf."[78] This simple statement encapsulates the *Sufi* teaching that spiritual development, like physical growth, takes time to develop naturally, and this explains the reason for the stations of the *Sufi* way. In a number of places in the literature, there are hints that liberation can take many lifetimes to achieve, requiring patience. These references occur when Sai Baba speaks of having known certain visitors or devotees in previous lifetimes. In the case of Upasani Maharaj, he refers to a special relationship of debt owing to him from a previous lifetime, when he saved the life of Sai Baba, a relationship which he termed *rinanubanda*. In this lifetime Sai Baba had drawn him to Shirdi to repay his debt, choosing the right time to spiritually uplift him.

The story of another visitor arriving in Shirdi asking for instant God-realization, also illustrates Sai Baba's method of teaching that God alone knows the right time when the aspirant is spiritually ready for the next step. Saying nothing to the visitor, Sai Baba first sent a note to a money-lender requesting a loan of a hundred rupees, but the money-lender sent back only respectful greetings. He repeated this a few times to different money-lenders, with the same negative result. Then he requested Nana Chandorkar to write a note and sent that to a money-lender, upon receipt of which the loan was immediately granted. "All is like this in the world," said Sai Baba. The visitor did not understand at all the purport of this rigmarole. Subsequently it was explained to him that Sai Baba was demonstrating that Nana Chandorkar as a Deputy Collector had earned creditworthiness in society, qualities valuable to a money-lender, whereas the spiritual qualities of a pennyless *faqir* were deemed to be, if not worthless, then uncreditworthy.[79] In the same way the qualities that have to be earned for God-realization are developed through the *sadhana* of spiritual practice, or through the stations and states of the *Sufi tariqat*, and take years of disciplined practice, devotion and patience. When a person is ready, then God-realization will automatically be granted. The folly of granting powers before someone is spiritually ready is illustrated in the account given by Khan of the Muslim Abdul Kadir who was staying in the *takya* in Shirdi.

> Kadir then begged of Baba to give him *fakir* as he wanted to become saint. Baba then flung his folded palm at him as though he held something in it and was flinging it at

> him. But there was nothing visible held in Baba's and. Thereafter Kadir's manner and talk were changed. He gave moral advice and behaved like Baba.

After a few months Kadir's behaviour degenerated with foul abuse and throwing stones, and Sai Baba decided to reverse the situation by withdrawing his open palm from Kadir, and the man returned to his former self. Sai Baba had made him realize he was not yet ready for saintly life, and so off he went and opened a *beedi* or cigarette shop in Poona.[80]

Sai Baba did not normally give long discourses or give *upadesa* or special teachings, but to a lady called Radha Bai Deshmukin, he apparently did both. In the course of his instruction he spoke of *saburi*. She wanted to fast to death or perform *satyagraha* in order to persuade Sai Baba to give her a *mantra*. This would be a standard request to one's Hindu *guru*, but Sai Baba refused saying that since he was from a different tradition and his *guru* did not give *mantras*, so he was not able to give her one. He continued that his *guru* just asked that he give the two coins of *Brahma-nista* and *saburi*, which are complete trust in God and courageous patience. His advice was, "Mother, *saburi* is courage, do not discard it. It ferries you across to the distant goal. It gives manliness to men, eradicates sin and dejection and overcomes all fear.[81] Sai Baba is uniting here both the fifth and sixth stations of the *Sufi* way.

Tawakkul - Complete Trust in God

The sixth station of the *tariqat* is *tawakkul,* translated as 'complete faith and trust in God' to the extent of utter dependence upon Him. *Tawakkul* comes from the Arabic *wakl* meaning to entrust one's affairs to another, but is used in the *Sufi* sense of placing one's trust in God. The origin of the admonition comes from the *Qur'an*: 'And whosoever puts his trust in God, He shall suffice him. God attains his purpose.[82] This is one of the most important of the *Sufi maqamat*, and, according to Schimmel, 'is of central importance for an understanding of classical *Sufi* thought'.[83] It is also the keystone of Islam, as the term *Islam* itself means submission to the will of *Allah*. *Iman* which is faith is an integral component of the willingness of devotees to submit to *Allah*. In the orthodox *Sufi* view the degree of *tawakkul* or trust in God varies according to the degree of faith. Perfect faith results in the ultimate *tawakkul*, that of total surrender to God. Although *tawakkul* and *iman* can both be translated as faith, there is a significant qualitative difference between the ordinary man's *iman* - faith defined as belief, and the *tawakkul* of a *Sufi* adept which is absolute sole reliance on God.

The *salik* or traveller on the spiritual path must grow to have the supreme confidence that God will supply his most basic needs, even his daily food. It has become a *Sufi* maxim that 'what you give to God he will return tenfold.' Attar recounts the story of the *Sufi* woman saint Rabi'a 'Adawiyya, who had complete trust that God would deliver tenfold:

> Two notables of the faith came to visit Rabe'a [*sic*] and both were hungry. "It may well be that she will give us food", they said to each other. "Her food is bound to come from a lawful source.". When they sat down there was a napkin with two loaves laid before them. They were well content. A beggar arrived just then, and Rabe'a gave him the two loaves. The two men of religion were much upset, but said nothing. After a while a maidservant entered with a handful of warm bread. "My mistress sent these," she explained. Rabe'a counted the loaves. There were eighteen. "Perhaps it was not this that she sent me", Rabe'a remarked. For all that the maidservant assured her, it profited nothing. So she took back the loaves and carried them away. Now it so happened that she had taken two of the loaves for herself. She asked her mistress, and she added the two to the pile and returned with them. Rabe'a counted them again, and found there were twenty loaves. She now accepted them. "This is what your mistress sent me", she said. She set the loaves before the two men and they ate, marvelling.[84]

Many of the hagiographies of the great *Sufi* saints include examples of their unquestioning trust in God, and on this station of the path it is forbidden to even store food or money for the next day. The *Sufi* aspirant's utter dependence on divine providence is thereby severely tested. The life of Sheikh Baba Farid well illustrates this point. Baba Farid was often the recipient of many offerings of food and money called *futuh*, but true to his vow of poverty and strong faith in divine providence, he distributed it all to the poor, hoarding nothing for tomorrow. Shaikh Nizamuddin Aulia's instructions were, "Do not accept any village or stipend of favour from kings and officials. It is not permitted to a dervish."[85] Once, when a royal gift of *tankahs* (coins) was given by Balban to Baba Farid, he ordered Maulana Ishaq to distribute it all to the poor, even though it was getting late and dark. When all the money was quickly doled out, the Maulana found one small coin left. At prayer that night, Baba Farid found that something was disturbing his concentration. This happened three times. At last he asked the Maulana if all the money was distributed and learnt of the one small coin left. Angrily he threw it away and then found that he was able to return to his prayers undisturbed.[86] When Sultan Nasiruddin gifted a few villages to Baba Farid to provide an income to support his family and charitable work, Baba Farid refused the gift, saying that to accept would place him under an obligation. When God was the provider there was no obligation.[87]

The Sanskrit/Marathi translation of *tawakkul* is *brahma-nista.* Sai Baba often stressed the importance of *brahma-nista* and its corollary, surrender to God, along with *saburi* as being key traits to be developed not only by *faqirs* and ascetics but also by his householder devotees. Identifying the *guru* with God, he declared: "Trust in the *Guru* fully. That is the only *sadhana*."[88] His own trust in God for all his needs was complete, and for many years any surplus food obtained through begging was placed in an earthenware dish so that anyone, including animals and birds, could help themselves. Like Baba Farid, in his latter years large sums of money, donations and food offerings would flow to him during his *darbar* when he gave audience, but by the end of the day it was all given away. Each day he started afresh. Sai Baba taught:

> People must put full faith in the Lord's Providence. They should not worry about food and clothing. Do not waste your life on these. In the abode of my devotees, there will be no dearth of food and clothing.[89]

A threat to the *Sufi's* pure ideal of complete trust in God was association with the corrupting influence of rich and powerful people. In order to preserve their personal integrity, the *Sufi* rule was to avoid any contact with kings and it was especially forbidden to accept royal favours. Baba Farid's refusal of the Sultan's gift of villages is an example. Similarly, Sai Baba chose to settle in Shirdi away from any centres of wealth or power, and he had neither rich nor famous people linked with him, nor any wealthy patron - thus he was totally independent, obliged to no one. As Sai Baba placed his faith in his own *guru*, so he called for faith in himself. Speaking in his own role as *guru/murshid*, having achieved the goal of complete oneness and identity with God, Sai Baba said: "Place entire faith in my words. Your object will be accomplished."[90] There are many similar statements recorded, and the reason they are looked upon today in Maharashtra as sacred scripture or *pothi,* is that many devotees who did place their faith in him were rewarded with his help, healing and protection. Many testimonials exist attesting to this effect.

During his last decade, Sai Baba severely tested the faith and trust of many of his devotees. It was simple enough to visit the saint, take his *darshan* and donate a few rupees, but to remain at Shirdi for days or weeks longer because the saint refused permission to go, when there were urgent affairs waiting at home, was a real test of faith. It was the custom for even short stay visitors to ask Sai Baba for permission to leave and request his blessings. Mostly he would confer the blessing *Allah acha karega* or *Khuda acha karega,* meaning God will take care of everything, but occasionally he would refuse permission, telling the devotee to wait. Often those individuals had important appointments, urgent business to attend to, or meetings with superiors, officers, etc., and found themselves placed in an awkward position. There are numerous accounts from those who decided to comply with

Sai Baba's wishes that to their amazement it all worked out smoothly. For example, an urgent court date would be delayed for the exact number of days they had been kept in Shirdi, or missed business meetings would turn out to have been cancelled for some reason. On the other hand those who left without permission or in spite of Sai Baba's explicit instruction to stay, oftentimes found themselves involved in accidents, caught in severe storms or floods, or were left waiting for hours at cold railway stations for trains that never came. On one occasion it required enormous faith on the part of Kakasaheb Dixit to obey Sai Baba, when his son was supposed to go to Bombay for very important examinations, and the saint told him - without any explanation - not to send the boy at that time. Only later, after complying with the command, did they find that the examinations had been cancelled due to excessive rainfall.[91] Similarly, Minakshi, the daughter of Nana Chandorkar, tells the story of how around 1900, her father was to catch a train at Chitale. Sai Baba kept him back for half an hour insisting that he eat his lunch. Another man went to catch the train without his meal, while unknown to all except Sai Baba, the train times had been changed, making it arrive half an hour later.[92]

The ultimate aspect of *tawakkul* is total surrender to God. Sai Baba himself became a fully surrendered instrument of God: "Without God's permission nothing can be done by me", he declared.[93] In his fully surrendered state Sai Baba saw no difference between himself and God, and similarly no difference between any Hindu form of God or *Allah*. If a devotee was attached to and had faith in God, whatever the name and form of the deity, he encouraged this. There are many instances cited in the volumes of *Devotees' Experiences of Sri Sai Baba* of his encouraging the worship of Hindu deities such as Ganesa, Saptasringi, Dattatreya, Vitthala and Siva. Although to orthodox Muslim thinking the anthropomorphic forms of the Hindu deities were blasphemy, Sai Baba was not promoting the use of idols, images or deities, but *Brahma-nista*, the trust in God which lay behind the external forms.[94] To further promote the notion of the

Divine as One Essence which could take many names and forms, Sai Baba granted visions of himself to various devotees in the form of their own personal deity. To a Ram *bhakta* he showed himself as Ram, to a devotee of Dattatreya as this three-headed deity, and so forth. In a similar way he demonstrated his interconnectedness with all saints and souls directed to God. Nana Chandorkar on one occasion asked permission to go and bathe in the Godavari River during a solar eclipse, and Sai Baba gave his assent. After he had his bath and performed ritual worship or *puja* at the eclipse, Nana Chandorkar gave a small coin as *daksina* to a *faqir* standing on the bank of the river. To his amazement, when he returned, Sai Baba showed him the same coin, and told him he accepted his offering. Ramalingaswamy comments that Nana Chandorkar's faith in Baba was thereby strengthened.[95]

Rida - Quiescence of the heart

According to al-Sarraj, the seventh and last *maqam* of the *Sufi* spiritual path is *rida,* a concept which variously embodies the notions of contentment, satisfaction, tranquillity, quiescence of the heart, and bliss. It is sometimes classed by other authors as one of the spiritual states or *ahwal* rather than a station, as it is more of a feeling of joy and satisfaction which arises from close proximity to God. It is an inner joy or feeling of equanimity that arises from complete *tawakkul*, the unequivocal acceptance of whatever God sends. Al-Ghazali summed up how a *Sufi* should conduct himself:

> The rule of the *Sufi* is that Poverty should be his adornment and Patience his ornament and Satisfaction his steed, and Trust his dignity.[96]

Here is a gradation leading from renunciation of worldly possessions, through loss of even the desire for them, to a state of contentment and complete dependence on God. Al-Ghazali rates the quality of trust in God as the pinnacle, leaving the unreal world for the world of true Reality he calls *al-Haqq*.

The very fact that Sai Baba achieved the ultimate full realization of God attests to his full confidence and joy in his relationship with God as His instrument. With conviction born of experience he was able to say:

> God is Great. He is the Supreme Master - *Allah Malik.* How great is God! No one can compare with him. He creates, supports and destroys. His sport (*Lila*) is inscrutable. Let us be content to remain as He makes us, to submit our wills to His. *Allah Rakega Vahisa Rahena* - Take what comes from God.[97] Be contented and cheerful. Never worry. Not a leaf moves but by His will....But we must not be obsessed with egoism and fancy that we are the independent causes of action. God is that Actor. We must recognise His independence and our dependence on Him, and see all acts as His. If we do so, we shall be unattached and free from Karmic bondage.[98]

Thus the contentment that Sai Baba advocates is identical to the *Sufi* concept of *rida*, and his whole thought and teaching has been shown to dovetail closely with the structured stations and stages of the *Sufi* path.

The *Sufi Ahwal* - Flashes of Spiritual Understanding

While *ahwal* and *maqamat* are closely associated in *Sufi* literature, the classification of the former is a more subtle concept than the latter. *Ahwal* which loosely translates as states, or states of awareness, or flashes of understanding, are said to be the gift of God, but words fail to elucidate precisely what is meant. Various attempts to define *ahwal* include, 'divine visions descending on the pure conscience',[99] *lawa'ah* - glimmers of light, *lawami'* - flashes, or *tajalli* - irradiation, a mystic feeling of the heart, or the grace and favour which God bestows upon the heart. They indicate, therefore, more than mere feelings or emotional states, although these may be involved - what is being described here is dawning of understanding or taste of the divine, rather than intellectual knowledge. This notion can be illustrated with the classic example of the mango fruit. In this example it is possible for a person to intellectually know everything there is to know about the mango, its botanical genus, its pattern of flowering, cash crop value, its colour, ripeness and texture, yet one must taste it to know the flavour. A different level of understanding is reached after the taste experience - an awareness previously missing, even though one did not know that one was ignorant. Similarly, what the *Sufis* appear to be classifying as *ahwal* are small experiences or 'tastes' of the mystic realm, brought on by their ascetic practices and intense devotion, leading to progressively greater understanding of the individual's relationship to God. The 'flavour' of what true spirituality means is slowly revealed to him. Once experienced there is no return to the former state of ignorance.

Al-Sarraj lists ten *ahwal* - states or flashes of awareness: 1) *muraqabat*, constant awareness of God; 2) *qurb*, proximity to God; 3) *mahabbat*, love of God; 4) *khawf,* fear of God; 5) *raja*, hope in God; 6) *shawq,* the soul's intense longing for union with God; 7) *uns*, an intimacy, joy, and affinity with God; 8) *itma'ninat*, tranquillity, peace; 9) *mushahada,* contemplation of God; 10) *yaqin*, certainty of God's presence. This list has been amended and added to over the years by various *Sufi* Orders and some that are listed here as states are counted as stations elsewhere. In all probability the experience of each *pir* or *Sufi* Master varied, as the *ahwal* revolve around an individual's feelings of proximity, intimacy, or closeness to God. At this level, any uncertainty as to the existence of God is long gone, and from here on the spiritual path leads progressively toward greater and greater awareness of the individual's essential unity with God. Initially, the *Sufis* describe this ignorance of the closeness of God as thousands of veils known as *kashf,* which, as the aspirant proceeds on the path, become unveiled one by one, revealing little by little more of the truth. There is a *Sufi* parable which illustrates the idea of God's constant presence - it is just man's ignorance that separates him from that awareness:

> Fishes asking what water was, went to a wise fish. He told them that it was all around them, yet they still thought that they were thirsty.[100]

Since *ahwal* involve personal transformation, we have no real way of knowing the actual details of Sai Baba's experience. We can merely speculate from his later behaviour and status that he must have experienced all the ten states. God-realization follows the attainment of all these 'gifts of God', and Sai Baba, as we have shown, became a fully 'Perfected' Master. On rare occasions he made statements attesting to his divine status, saying "*Allah mein hum*"- 'I am God'.

The first two states - *muraqabat*, the constant awareness of God, and *qurb*, the awareness of one's proximity to God, are both concerned with the conviction that God is omnipresent and omniscient, that God is acquainted with his most secret thoughts. These notions are founded in the *Qur'an* which proclaims that God 'knows what his soul whispers within him, and we are nearer to him than the jugular vein,'[101] and 'whithersoever you turn there is the face of God. God is All-embracing, All-knowing.'[102]

Sai Baba practised *Sufi dhikr*, the constant recollection of the name of *Allah* all his life, this fact being recorded many times throughout the biographies, in spite of their overall Hindu orientation. It must therefore have been a very prominent feature of the saint, which the biographers could not fail to mention. That Sai Baba constantly practised *dhikr*, even while sleeping, is illustrated in his instruction to Mhalsapati one night, to place his hand on his chest to feel the vibration, and to awaken him if he stopped the constant repetition of *Allah* in his sleep.[103] Narasimhaswami records this incident with Sai Baba declaring:

> "You had better sit up. Do not go to sleep. Place your hand on my heart. I will be going on with the remembrance of *Allah*, *Nama Smaran*, that is a half-conscious trance, and during that *Nama Smaran*, the heart beat would clearly show you that I am still having *Nama Smaran*. If that suddenly goes away and natural sleep supervenes, wake me up."[104]

In his Absolute mode, Sai Baba inferred that he was in constant touch with God, saying: "Whatever you do, wherever you may be, ever bear this in mind, that I am always aware of everything you do....My eye [of vigilant supervision] is ever on those who love me."[105] He backed up these lofty statements with tangible demonstrations of healing power, miracles and demonstrations of knowing what was happening in distant places. Nana Chandorkar, for example, in a story cited earlier, experienced Sai Baba's pledge: "I will be with you whenever and wherever you think of me"[106], when he sat on a rock on the Harischandra hill, thirsty, thinking of his *guru*, and his thirst was duly satisfied due to Sai Baba's intervention.[107] Sai Baba once declared after the noon *arati*: "Be wherever you may, Do whatever you may, Remember this always. I ever know whate'r you do or say."[108] Many devotees reported that Sai Baba often revealed by his comments that he knew what they had been talking about, even though they were far away from the *masjid*, and that he would offer precise explanations and clear up doubts which had come up in their distant discussions. Another example of Sai Baba's clairvoyance was related by Das Ganu, who, one day in his usual round of paying respects to the deities in all the temples in Shirdi, found one door locked and thus omitted to pay obeisance to that deity. On arriving at the *masjid*, Das Ganu was immediately sent back to the temple to pay his *namaskars* to the deity he had missed, by Sai Baba, although the saint had no normal way of knowing about the omission.

Al-Sarraj lists the third state as *mahabbat,* translated as mystical love of God. Originally this had meant 'obedience' to God, but Jami averred that 'true love is to act in the obedience of the beloved.'[109] 'Attar declared in his work *Tadhkirat al-aulia* - The Stories of the Saints - that the *Sufis* came to be certain that 'nothing is dearer to God than that man loves him.'[110] The nearer the mystic advances towards the divine beloved, the more he apprehends the depth of mystery of God which he longs to understand. Thus, love of God is one of the three cardinal doctrines of the *Sufis*, the other two being gnosis known as *mar'ifat* and unification with God known as *tauhid.* Mystics have identified three different facets of the absolute love of God: intimacy with God known as *uns*; proximity to God known as *qurb*; and longing for God known as *shawq*[111], which are here treated as states in their own right. Although God's love may be classified as a state, it is listed as a station by some *Sufi* masters. Passionate or intense love of God called *'Ishq* is sometimes classified as a station, although Subhan's definition is more in keeping with a state, '...in which the Divine influence inclines the soul towards the love of God.'[112]

This was a crucial point of divergence for the *Sufis* from Islamic orthodoxy. It was this quality of intense love for God as shown by Rabi'a 'al-Adawiyya, the great woman saint of the eighth century, that brought about the transformation of Islamic asceticism to the love mysticism of Sufism. The *Sufis* hold that only through love can the lower self, known as the *nafs,* be transmuted into the spiritual qualities, and that God becomes the eye, ear and hand of anyone whom he loves. Muhasibi gives a good description of it thus:

> The Love of God in its essence is really the illumination of the heart by joy because of its nearness to the Beloved, for love, in solitude, rises up triumphant and the heart of the lover is possessed by the sense of its fellowship with Him, and when solitude is combined with secret intercourse with the Beloved, the joy of that intercourse overwhelms the mind, so that it is no longer concerned with this world and what is therein. To that one whom God has placed in the rank of His lovers, He gives the vision of Himself.[113]

Intense love for God and God's love for his devotee was an integral and significant message of Sai Baba. He declared: "God is everywhere. There is no place from which he is absent.... Thereby Love is there itself. When that springs up, everything is achieved."[114] The result of man's devotion for God is a gift of Love from God - a spiritual treasure - far more valuable than any material gifts. But man is so blinded by the world that he fails to realize the value of the offered gift. Sai Baba lamented: "No one listens to me or my wisdom. My treasury is open. None brings carts to take from it. I say dig; none will take any pains. I say dig out the treasure and cart it away."[115] The essential message of Sai Baba is that God's love is for all, but he advises that the response from God is greater for those who actively turn to God. Again speaking in his Absolute mode he says: "Look to me and I will look to you", and, "If anyone casts his burden on me and thinks of me, I look after his concerns."[116] There is a reciprocity of love being expressed here, a notion integral to the *Sufi hal* of *mahabbat*.

The next two states are '*khawf*' and '*raja*', the interconnected opposites of 'fear of God' and 'hope in God'. Both are allied to the state of proximity to God known as *qurb* and are often seen as 'the two wings of devotion, without which it will not fly'.[117] The closer one is to approaching God the stronger the emotions of love or fear are likely to be. According to the station one has reached on the path, the nature of the fear in the heart will differ. For the novice the fear will be of the vengeance of God or divine retribution. For those firmly on the path, the fear is more the loss and separation from Him. For those nearing the goal there will be fear that something might impair the final gnosis or mystical experience. Likewise, the emotion of hope in God known as *raja* early on the path is a hope for God's kindness, which gives way to desire for some reward or boon. However, the perfect form of hope is for complete mergence or union with God.

Sai Baba, in the mode of the Absolute, declared on innumerable occasions words to the effect: "Why should anyone fear when I am here?", which has become a well-known aphorism inspiring the popular *bhajan* mentioned earlier.[118] Sai Baba made a vow: "Wherever you may be, think of me, and I am by your side"[119] and, "I will not allow my devotees to come to harm. I have to take thought for my devotees. And if a devotee is about to fall; I stretch out my hands, and thus with four outstretched hands at a time to support him, I will not let him fall."[120] Regarding the reference to 'four' hands, Narasimhaswami suggests that this just means 'a number of' or many. Speaking to a largely Hindu audience, it could suggest Sai Baba in his Absolute mode, identifying with the four-armed Vishnu, the second deity of the

Hindu Triad whose role is that of Sustainer or Protector. It echoes the incident in the *Bhagavad Gita* where Krishna reveals his four arms to Arjuna. Physical distance is no barrier in the spiritual world, and at the time of death, a period of great fear for most people, Sai Baba declared, "I draw my devotee to me, at the time of his death, even though he may die a thousand miles away [from Shirdi]."[121] He made it clear that this promise applied also to those who love God with a different name or form, not just Sai Baba, as God is all names and all forms.

Sai Baba's language was truly mystic for he talked back and forth between the Absolute mode and the mode of surrendered servant or even bondslave of the Lord. In the former mode he made such statements as: "I am formless and everywhere,"[122] and, "I look equally on all. Not a leaf moves, except by my grace...."[123] In the latter mode of surrendered instrument of God, he declares: "Without God's permission, nothing can be done by me,"[124] and, "Baba is but a *phaladata* [lit. giver of the fruit, or dispenser of the result]."[125] However, his message is clear on both fear and hope that if one becomes God's or Sai Baba's devotee, then one will be under his protective wing and need have no fear. If then the devotee has patience his hopes will be realized, and in due course he will indeed be raised spiritually. This blessing is not to be confused with worldly benefits such as material prosperity, fame, power or even health, although these may in fact occur as by-products. The promise is for the achievement of the *Sufi* goal of mystical union with God, or the realization that one was never in truth separate from God.

Among many quotations in this vein of protection and guidance, Sai Baba said: "If you make me the sole object of your thoughts and aims, you will gain *paramartha* - the supreme goal."[126] Some visitors came to see Sai Baba at first merely out of curiosity to see a miracle-worker, then gradually they started coming to listen to what Sai Baba was teaching. Nana Chandorkar, for example, began listening to Sai Baba this way, and eventually gained complete confidence that Sai Baba did indeed demonstrate the qualities of divinity. Others however, such as Das Ganu, although they had great respect for the saint, and had been shown many phenomenal miracles, could never quite come to terms with admitting Sai Baba's divinity. Das Ganu, on seeking Sai Baba's permission one day to go to Prayag where the holy Ganges and Yamuna rivers meet to perform *puja*, was told by Sai Baba that it was not necessary as Prayag was right there. When Das Ganu put his head on Baba's feet, Ganges water flowed from the toes of the saint. Acknowledging the miracle, Das Ganu was overwhelmed by devotion, but could not bring himself to drink the water as holy water, *tirth* or *prasad*. Yet Das Ganu continued to visit Sai Baba and was responsible through his *kirtans* and devotional songs for bringing thousands of people to Shirdi.

The sixth *hal* that descends on the consciousness of the aspirant is *shawq,* the longing of the soul for union with God to the exclusion of all else. This is a state where the material world holds no further attraction for the aspirant, who, having intense love for the Lord, finds that nothing is more important than the fulfillment of his longing for mergence with God. This longing together with the grace of God leads to full illumination or the unveiling of the truth. There is a story told of Abu Yazid Bayazid, who when asked how old he was, replied, 'Four years!' When asked to explain he answered, 'I have been veiled [from God] by the world for seventy years, but I have seen Him during the last four years: the period in which one is veiled does not belong to one's life.'[127]

Sai Baba underwent an experience in 1886 that must have been similar to that of Abu Yazid Bayazid. He had been performing many of the ascetic practices and in this year his longing for union with God was so intense that he decided to go into meditation, or a deep trance which he must have surmised would lead either to death or to an enlightenment experience. He announced to Mhalsapathi: "I am going to *Allah*. Take care of this body for three days. If I return, I will look after it myself thereafter."[128] As he appeared to have passed away the village officials wanted to bury his body, but Mhalsapathi, obeying the instructions of his Master, would not let them take away the body.

He stayed like this for three days and nights, and at the end of this period the saint's instructions were that he would either come back to life, or they could then bury him. On the third day he suddenly regained normal consciousness and apparently it is from this point in time that his spiritual mission began in earnest.[129] It was at this point that the veil had been lifted, and his life could thus be reckoned from this date in 1886 as Abu Yazid Bayazid reckoned his life from the period of unveiling.

The seventh *hal* is *'uns*, variously translated as the feeling of intimacy with God, spiritual joy, or the heart's joy in the Beloved. Intimacy with God takes away fear and loneliness. There is a story which tells of a novice whose master sent him to a lonely spot and then forgot about him for a week. Remembering and hastening to the place, he asked the young *Sufi* for forgiveness, but the novice replied, 'Do not worry, God has taken away the fear of loneliness from His friend.'[130]

Sai Baba intimated to a number of devotees that he had known them for many lifetimes or *janmas*. This special pre-natal connection he termed *rinanubanda*, and it was as if he had followed their careers throughout a series of lifetimes. To Nana Chandorkar, he said: "Nana, you and I have been intimate with each other for the last four births. You do not know that; but I do."[131] Another time Sai Baba told G.S.Khaparde that he himself and some of his current devotees, including Khaparde, Jog, Hari Sitaram Dixit, Shama and Dada Kelkar were all living together with their *guru* in a former birth.[132] He also indicated that he could cause the soul of a child who died to be reborn to the same mother. A Mr. and Mrs. Sapatnekar came to Sai Baba, sad that their child had passed away from a throat disease. We do not have space to give the whole story here - it is given in great detail by Gunaji - suffice it to say that Sai Baba blessed them with the words: "I will again bring that very child back in his wife's womb", and in due course a son was born to them.[133]

The eighth *hal* is termed '*itma'ninat* which may be translated as peace, tranquillity or rest in God. This state is also described in the *Qur'an*: 'Those who believe, their hearts being at rest in God's remembrance.'[134] One day in his *masjid*, Sai Baba was petitioned by a Hindu visitor on this very topic. He said that although he had read many *sastras* and sacred scriptures he had no peace of mind. 'Pray grant me your blessing', he begged. Sai Baba then told one of his mystic parables:

> A merchant came here. In his presence, a quadruped passed its stomata, i.e. nine balls of stool. The merchant anxious to attain his quest spread his cloth beneath its tail, gathered all the nine balls and took them away. He got concentration and peace of mind.[135]

Having to ask another devotee for an explanation of the mystic meaning, the visitor learnt that God's grace was the quadruped, and that the nine balls of stool represent the traditional nine forms of devotion called *bhakti*. They must be collected and followed. The goal in this case was peace of mind, and tranquillity, which is induced by the practice of the nine forms of devotion to God. As previously discussed the elements of *bhakti* are very close to those of Sufism. The nine steps of devotion include: reciting the name of God; remembrance and meditation; paying respects to saints; service; fellowship; and self-surrender. All these elements are also integral to the practice of Sufism and indeed Islam.

The penultimate *hal* listed by al-Sarraj is *mushahada* - the illumination of the heart by Divine Light. Categorized by some *Sufis* as a station, others class it as a state of understanding which comes when the heart is fixed on the contemplation of God for His own sake, and in the process the ego is obliterated. It leads to a state of ecstasy known as *wajd*. This state can sometimes be achieved in devotional singing, termed *sama*, and a *Sufi*'s reaction to the experience varies with the individual, leading to quiet enjoyment of bliss or violent energetic movements or dance. Al-Arabi describes ecstasy as the lifting of the veil, and the passing away from where you are. All doubts and suspicions are cast away when the Light has been shed abroad in their hearts.[136] A *pir* is said to be able to transmit this spiritual power to his *murid* or disciple whom he pictures in close proximity, through entering a deep state of concentration or trance known as *tawajjuh*.

Similarly the disciple has to concentrate on receiving the power from his *pir*. The *pir* can effect great transformation and spiritual changes, sometimes by a mere glance.[137]

This same notion of *tawajjah* is identified in Marathi as *saksatkara* and features in the Sai Baba literature, where it refers to the granting of a vision or a transformation experience to a devotee by Sai Baba. It was regarded by devotees in Shirdi as a coveted gift which aroused envy and jealousy among devotees. Narasimhaswami admits that the definitions of *saksatkara* vary but 'to those who believe in God as a person with form and never without form, a *darshan* or vision of that form is called *saksatkar*, and is the highest rung of the spiritual ladder. Those who disbelieve in forms which are said to be divine, use the term *saksatkara* to denote a mystic merger of their own personality in the impersonal Absolute'.[138] The Hindu view and the *Sufi* view of God-realisation were thus both accommodated in this definition. Sai Baba's ability to transform and spiritually raise an ordinary individual into a saint within four years was demonstrated in the case of Kasinath Upasani, already cited, into the famous Maharashtrian saint Upasani Maharaj.

In his early days Sai Baba used to dispense herbal medicine to the villagers, but after his experience of God-realization he gave only holy ash or *udi* to cure disease, which proved to be equally effective when given by his hand. He also suggested unusual healing remedies, such as the use of raw onion on the eyes as a foment.[139] While in the west this sounds to be an unlikely remedy, onion juice in fact is recommended for eye problems in the *Ayurveda*. In his later years when his powers were fully apparent an experience of God could come to devotees of Sai Baba merely by taking his *darshan*. He said: "If one sees me and me alone and listens to talk about me and is devoted to me alone, he will reach God (Caitanya)."[140] There is an interchange between Sai Baba and a lady and her husband from Bombay, which occurred in 1917, that was recorded in detail and which illustrates the aforegoing: the lady tells Sai Baba that she wants to escape from the cycle of birth and death. He tells her: "Think who you are." When the lady did not understand, her husband explained privately to his wife later:

> *Husband*: Baba's words are mysterious.... the *jiva* [individual soul] goes on incarnating any number of times till it gets *saksatkara* , i.e. sees or realises God. Baba is God. But people seeing do not get full faith and do not see him, i.e. feel him to be God; hence they do not get *mukti* [liberation]. One must learn from the *sastras* that *jiva* and Siva [God] are one. You think yourself to be *jiva* is it not?
> *Lady*: Yes.
> *Husband*: Baba and the *sastras* want you to regard yourself as Siva or God.
> *Lady*: No, I am a petty sinner - a *jiva* and not the great God Siva.
> *Husband*: No doubt that is your feeling. But Baba means that by constantly regarding yourself as God, your deeply ingrained belief that you are only a finite *jiva* will be removed. This process may be continued through numerous births and, strengthened and helped by contact with saints, will give you the firm belief that you are Brahman.
> (*The pair again returned to Dwaraka Mai*)
> *Baba*: Mother, I have listened (from here) to all that your husband told you. Keep that in mind.[141]

The ultimate conclusion is the conviction that at core one is divine, and heralds the final *hal* of *yaqin*, which translates as certainty. This is an intuitive certainty that God and the self are identical - *Haqq-ul-yaqin*. The presence of God can be inferred from the very existence of the world, as fire is inferred from billowing smoke, and by direct perception, which is like seeing the actual fire. The *Haqq-ul-yaqin* is the intuitive conviction which comes as a culmination of all the prior states, now seen as glimpses of understanding which merge at the summit into one all-encompassing view, resulting in the certainty of one's own divinity. This *gnosis* is known as *ma'rifat*. On attaining this stage al-Hallaj could then justly declare: *'Ana 'l Haqq* - I am God. This is the prelude to obliteration of the self as a separate entity with its attendant transformation of human attributes into divine ones.

Another important concept is the Sufi notion of '*fana*', which in the eyes of some Sufi Masters is the final *maqamat* on the path. Others say it is the ultimate state, beyond all classifications. '*Fana*' is an Arabic word which means 'passing away', annihilation, or nothingness. It was first propounded by Abu Yazid Bistami. As adapted by Sufism, *fana* means loss of the individual self in Reality, or freedom from the limitations of the self. Certain manifestations such as internal silence, loss of self-awareness, experience of light, joy, ecstasy, vision of Reality, intuition and certainty may be experienced in that state. Nicholson comments,

> Since the *wali* or saint is the popular type of Perfect Man, it should be understood that the essence of Mohammedan saintship, as of prophecy, is nothing less than Divine illumination, immediate vision and knowledge of things unseen and unknown, when the veil of sense is suddenly lifted and the conscious self passes away in the overwhelming glory of "the One true Light".[142]

Abu'l Qasim al-Junayd of Baghdad defined Sufism itself in terms of *fana* saying, 'Sufism means that God makes you die to yourself and makes you alive in Him.'[143] Junayd interpreted *fana* in terms of the passing away of the Sufi's will, leading to *baqa* or unitive life in God.

In 1886, Sai Baba had an experience of what could be called in Sufi practice, *fana*, a phenomenon which the saint himself called 'going to *Allah*'. His Hindu followers and Hindu biographers termed this a '72 hours' *samadhi'*, and the circumstances have been cited earlier.[144] Unfortunately this very key experience was not well-recorded, but it would appear that his mission became clear to him only after this experience. It is most probable that he gained many of his powers after this. Although the thirty-two years following this experience until his final passing away were remembered in folk memory, only his last decade has been recorded in any precise detail. Nevertheless this 1886 incident, when looked at from a *Sufi* perspective, can be interpreted as an experience of *fana*, the temporary passing away of the lower self, and an act of complete union with the divine. Although the body appeared to have passed away and subsequently returned to life, Sai Baba from then on seemed to be operating in two spheres, the worldly and spiritual. A devotee of Sai Baba, Mrs. Manager was interviewed by Narasimhaswami in May 1936, and her observations are relevant to this discussion:

> One noticeable difference between Sai Baba and other saints struck me. I have moved with other notable saints also. I have seen them in high *Samadhi* or trance condition entirely forgetting their body, effacing the narrow notion of self confined to the body; and I have seen them later getting conscious of their surroundings, knowing what is in our heart and replying to us. But with Sri Sai Baba, there was this peculiar feature. He had not to go into trance to achieve anything, or to reach any higher position or knowledge. He was every moment exercising a double consciousness, one actively utilizing the Ego called Sri Sai Baba and dealing with other Egos in temporal or spiritual affairs, and the other - entirely superceding all Egos and resting in the position of the Universal Soul or Ego; he was exercising and manifesting all the powers and features incidental to both states of consciousness. Other saints would forget their bodies and surroundings and then return to it. But Sai Baba was always in and outside the material world.... [This] was not a matter of effort. He was in the all knowing state always.[145]

This sense of absorption in God or *baqa* persisted for the rest of Sai Baba's life.

Perhaps the first demonstration of Sai Baba's certainty of his own divinity, or at least the first on record, came in 1892. The village oil-mongers known as *telis* and other merchants called *banias*, got tired of being asked for free oil for the *faqir*'s oil lamps, and they decided to play a trick on him by refusing to supply him with any. Calmly Sai Baba returned to the *masjid*, secretly followed by some of these merchants, whereupon he was seen to take the oil pot which still contained a small amount of oil, pour a little water into it, drink a little and spit it back into the can. He again filled the pot with water and proceeded to fill the lamps, which continued to burn all night.[146] This single act transformed Sai Baba in the eyes of the villagers from being considered a madman into a saint or *awliya*. In his last years, after showing his divine qualities to many of his close devotees, Sai Baba expected that they at least would have some appreciation of their spiritual implications. When one devotee failed to comprehend him, he chided that those who thought that Baba is just in Shirdi have totally failed to understand Baba.[147] In other words one had to recognize his universal nature, and not confine him to place and time. In the same vein he asks: "Does 'Sai' mean to you only this three and a half cubits height of body?"[148] These statements convey advanced *Sufi* teaching, hardly suitable for spiritual novices. However, their questions and situations did provide the raw material through which Sai Baba's message could be conveyed to future generations, as is happening in India today, with the rapid proliferation of interest in him.

Many comparisons have been drawn in this chapter between the *Sufi maqamat* and *ahwal* of the *tariqat*, and the sayings of Sai Baba of Shirdi. It is very clear that there is a direct correspondence between Sai Baba's sayings and various elements of the *Sufi tariqat*, to a much greater extent than can be attributed to mere coincidence. In the remainder of Part II, we will look at Abdul, Sai Baba's *faqiri* servant/*murid* who was constantly with Sai Baba for nearly three decades until the latter's death. Then we will look at a notebook which Abdul kept of his talks with Sai Baba while they read the *Qur'an* together. Because the words in Abdul's notebook were those of Sai Baba, we have in this book designated it the *Saibaba MS*. It throws further light on the correspondence between Sai Baba's teachings and the Maharashtrian *Sufi* path, which has hitherto been overlooked by Hindu scholars and devotees.

NOTES

1. *Saibaba MS*, p. 107 [K31].
2. *Saibaba MS*, p. 98 [K40].
3. *Saibaba MS*, p. 97 [K41].
4. John A. Subhan, *Sufism its Saints and Shrines: An Introduction to the Study of Sufism with Special Reference to India and Pakistan* (Lucknow, U.P.: The Lucknow Publishing House, 1960), p. 68.
5. HU, p. 181.
6. Titus Burckhardt, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, trans D.M. Matheson (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1959), p.105.
7. *Qur'an*, 66:8.
8. Jorjani, *At-Ta'rifat*, quoted in Javad Nurbakhsh, *Sufism*, trans. William Chittick. (London: Khaniqahi-Nimatullahi Publications, 1988), IV:29.
9. A. Reza Arasteh, *Rumi The Persian, The Sufi,* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965, p. 13.
10. Sharafuddin Maneri, *The Hundred Letters*, trans. Paul Jackson (Bombay: 1985), p. 23.
11. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimension of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), p. 346.
12. SSG, p. 175.
13. Bharadwaja describes a similar experience of Sai Baba's contemporary, Hazrat Tajuddin Baba of Nagpur, in which he 'stood on his head and started dancing on his head and hands.' Bharadwaja, *Sai Baba the Master*, pp. 30-31.
14. SSG, p. 175.
15. Arthur Osborne, *The Incredible Sai Baba,* (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1973, pp. 5-6.)
16. SSG, p. 176 n.
17. CS, No. 292.
18. CS, No. 114.
19. CS, No. 225.
20. CS, No. 270.
21. CS, Nos. 183-190.
22. LSB, II:123.
23. LSB, II:122-134.
24. Quoted in Nurbakhsh, *Sufism*, IV:40.
25. Nurbakhsh, *Sufism,* IV:42.
26. AS, p. 14.
27. CS, No 233, p. 89.
28. HU, p. 321. Quoted in Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 115.
29. SSG, p. 173.
30. SSG, p. 49.
31. CS, p. 117.

32. LSB, II: 239.
33. LSB, III:168.
34. DE, p. 27.
35. CS, No. 205.
36. CS, No. 277A.
37. AS, p. 14.
38. Mohammad Tahanawi, *Kashshaf Estelahat al-Fonun*, (Calcutta: 1862,) p. 610, quoted in Nurbakhsh, *Sufism*, IV:60.
39. Quoted in Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 112.
40. *The Koran Interpreted*, trans. Arthur J. Arberry (Oxford: 1979), p. 629.
41. SSG, p. 20.
42. DE, p. 255.
43. DE, p. 37.
44. DE, pp. 57, 234.
45. DE, p. 170.
46. Quoted in Burkhardt, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, p. 160.
47. Muhasibi, *Muhasibat al-Nufus*, quoted in R.S. Bhatnagar, *Dimensions of Classical Sufi Thought* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1989), p. 48.
48. LSB, II:261-2.
49. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 237.
50. LSB, I:65.
51. CS, No 608, p. 265.
52. CS, Nos. 203-30.
53. CS, No. 219.
54. CS, No. 111.
55. AS, p. 108, quoted in Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 121.
56. Quoted in Burckhardt, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, p. 162.
57. Burckhardt, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, p. 107.
58. Maulana 'Abdur-Rahman Jami, *Lawa'ih*, Tehran: 1342/1963. In Persian. Ed, and trans. Edward Henry Whinfield and Mirza Muhammad Kazwini. (London: 1906).
59. Jami, quoted in Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p. 122.
60. AS, p. 9.
61. AS, pp. 14-15.
62. *garibi avvala badasahi amirise lakha savai garibomka alla bhai aksaim sai vadati*. SS, 5:68.
63. SSG, p. 24.
64. SSG, p. 24.
65. CS, No. 234.
66. CS, No. 252.
67. SSG, p. 48.
68. CS, No. 116.
69. CS, No. 235.

70. CS, Nos. 233-41.
71. DE, p. 174.
72. LSB, II:338.
73. CS, No. 204.
74. Bhatnagar, *Dimensions of Classical Sufi Thought*, p. 163.
75. Al-Ghazali quoted in Stade, *Ninety-nine Names of God in Islam*, p. 128.
76. AS, p. 15.
77. Tulpule, *Mysticism in Medieval India*, p. 74.
78. LSB, IV:39.
79. SSG, pp. 87-89.
80. DE, p. 278.
81. CS, No. 137.
82. *Qur'an*, 65:3.
83. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 117.
84. Fariduddin 'Attar, *Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-Auliya* (Memorial of the Saints) trans. A.J. Arberry (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 43.
85. Nizami, *Religion and Politics in India,* p. 244.
86. Nizami, *Religion and Politics in India,* p. 245.
87. Gurbachan Singh Talib, *Baba Sheikh Farid: His Life and Teachings* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1973), p. 8.
88. CS, No. 19.
89. CS, No. 262.
90. CS, No. 46.
91. CS, No. 143.
92. DE, p. 198.
93. CS, No. 101.
94. CS, Nos. 167-71.
95. Ramalingaswamy, *Ambrosia in Shirdi*, p. 148.
96. Smith, *Readings from the Mystics of Islam*, No 66, pp. 63-4.
97. A more correct Marathi transliteration would be '*Allah rakhega vaisa rahega*'.
98. CS, No. 267.
99. T.C. Rastogi, *Sufism: A Dictionary with Profiles of Saint-Poets* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Ltd., 1990), p. 5.
100. Quoted in Robert Ornstein, *Psychology of Consciousness* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), p. 277.
101. *Qur'an*, 50:15.
102. *Qur'an*, 2:109.
103. LSB, II:10.
104. LSB, II:10. We have no way of knowing if Sai Baba actually used the word *Nama Smaran*. It should be remembered that Mhalsapati was a Hindu, and he was being interviewed by Narasimhaswami who was also a Hindu about this experience. They were probably more concerned

with conveying the meaning than with accuracy of terminology, although they did report that the remembrance was of '*Allah*'.

105. CS, No. 9.
106. CS, No. 12.
107. LSB, II:47-52.
108. CS, No. 406.
109. Maulana 'Abdur Rahman Jami, *Nafahat al-uns*. Ed. by M. Tauhidipur (Tehran:1336 sh./1957, quoted in Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p. 131.
110. Attar, *Tadhkirat al-aulia* I:321, quoted in Schimmel, Mystical Dimensions, p.131.
111. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 132.
112. Suhan, *Sufism: Its Saints and Shrines*, p. 69.
113. Quoted in Smith, *Readings from the Mystics of Islam*, No. 16, p. 19.
114. CS, No. 122.
115. CS, No. 45.
116. CS, Nos. 19, 25.
117. HU, p. 18.
118. CS, Nos. 1, 4, 12, 30, 32, 33.
119. CS, No. 87.
120. CS, No. 35.
121. CS, No. 95.
122. CS, No. 24.
123. CS, No. 89.
124. CS, No. 101.
125. CS, No. 104-A.
126. CS, No. 19.
127. HU, p. 331.
128. CS, No.328.
129. SSG, p. 238.
130. Jami, *Nafahat al-uns*, p. 94, quoted in Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 132.
131. CS, No. 500.
132. CS, No. 502.
133. SSG, pp. 257-59.
134. *Qur'an*, 13:28.
135. CS, No. 117.
136. AS, p. 310.
137. Subhan, *Sufism: Its Saints and Shrines*, p. 89.
138. CS, p. 37.
139. It is interesting to note that the *Ayurveda* recommends the use of onion juice for eye ailments.
140. CS, No.20.
141. CS, No. 121.

142. Reynold A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (Cambridge: University Press, 1921), p. 78.
143. Al-Ghazzali, *Ihya'ulum al-din*, vol. IV, p. 67, quoted in Smith, *Readings from the Mystics*, No. 30.
144. SSG, p. 238.
145. DE, p. 67.
146. SSG, p. 27.
147. CS, No. 81.
148. CS, No. 72.

CHAPTER TEN

Abdul and his Notebook[1]

In the search to recover the *Sufi* aspects of Sai Baba, one of the most significant figures amongst his close devotees was Abdul, the son of Sultan of Nanded[2], who was the longtime Muslim servitor of Sai Baba. Abdul lived with Sai Baba in Shirdi for a continuous period of twenty-nine years before Sai Baba's death in 1918, perhaps longer and closer than any other devotee with the exception of Mhalsapati. He then remained in Shirdi for a further thirty-six years thereafter, tending Sai Baba's shrine or *dargah* until his own death in 1954. According to Narasimhaswami, Abdul commanded the respect of a wide circle of Hindus and Muslims. Shama tells us that many Rohillas (Muslims) came to Shirdi, and Abdul admitted that a number of saints and *faqirs* visited Baba, but that he was most often doing his work and did not always observe. From such incidental hints and indirect references in the biographies and accounts of devotees' experiences of Sai Baba, it is obvious that there must have been many itinerant *Sufi faqirs* or spiritual aspirants and mendicants who came to visit Sai Baba regularly over the decades, especially before 1910, and for whom he most likely acted as *pir*. However, details of their comings and goings, and of their relationship with Sai Baba, were never specifically recorded, meriting only passing reference in devotees' accounts. Fortunately, much more is known about the *Sufi faqir* Abdul, due to his long and unique association with Sai Baba.

Abdul was born in 1871 at Nanded, in Khandesh, on the banks of the river Tapti in northern Maharashtra. Apart from knowing that his father's name was Sultan, nothing further is known about his parents except that they placed their son under the care of a *Sufi* master called Amiruddin of Nanded presumably to undergo

Sufi ascetic training. In 1889, when Abdul was around eighteen years old, the *Faqir* Amiruddin had a dream in which Sai Baba appeared and gave him two ripe mangoes, instructing him that he should give them to Abdul and then send the boy to him at Shirdi. Amiruddin awoke from the dream to find that two actual mangoes had materialized on his bed. According to Abdul's own testimony, Amiruddin gave him these mangoes to take as a gift to Sai Baba and then immediately dispatched him to Shirdi.[3] Upon Abdul's arrival in Shirdi, Sai Baba welcomed him with the words: 'My crow has come (*mera kavala ala*).'[4] Nowhere in the Sai Baba literature is there any explanation of this seemingly strange utterance by him, and it is usually glossed over as one of the mystic's more enigmatic statements. Birds, however, are often used in *Sufi* poetry for their symbolic imagery, so that mention of the nightingale, dove, falcon, crow, etc. will evoke a particular image or quality. Significantly, the crow is often used as a token for the mundane things of this material existence. Sai Baba summoned Abdul in order to take care of the more mundane aspects of his daily life in Shirdi, and directed him to devote himself to his service. Abdul was expected to keep the five lamps around the *masjid* constantly filled with oil, and look after a lamp in the Lendi garden, which was protected by pieces of metal sheet and kept permanently lit by Sai Baba. He performed such tasks as sweeping the *masjid*, the *chavadi* or traveller's resthouse and even the streets, removing 'night-soil' or excrement. He fetched water and washed Sai Baba's clothes in the stream at the edge of the village. The designation of 'crow' by Sai Baba for the *faqir* Abdul was therefore highly appropriate.

According to the testimony of Dabholkar, Sai Baba had a very high regard for Abdul and came to rely upon him. Dabholkar describes him as 'Abdul, a great devotee and a great renouncer who constantly served Sai Baba (*bhakta abdul parame viragi sevasa nijamgim tatpara*).'[5] Abdul's constant service is shown in the story related by Dabholkar concerning one Amir Shakkar, a Muslim wholesale butcher from Bandra.[6] Abdul used to sleep behind Sai Baba, and on one occasion when Amir was also sleeping in the *chavadi*, Sai Baba suddenly cried out to Abdul to fetch a light and help look for a small creature making a rustling sound. A snake was eventually found hiding under Amir's pillow. Abdul helped kill it with Sai Baba's short stick called a *sakta*, and thus saved Amir's life.[7]

For the first few years with Sai Baba, Abdul lived in a stable and only later moved to a small house near the *chavadi* or traveller's lodge. Abdul later married and had a family, but when he first came to Shirdi no meals were provided and he had to beg for food like Sai Baba himself. Apparently Sai Baba took responsibility only for Abdul's spiritual development, guiding him along the stations and states of the *Sufi* path which Abdul had commenced under the guidance of Amiruddin, the Nanded *faqir*. Years later Amiruddin requested that Abdul be sent back to him, but Sai Baba refused to let him leave his side. Precise details of the guidance that Abdul received from Sai Baba over the nearly thirty years they were together are sparse, but Abdul indicates that Sai Baba kept him strictly on the path of renunciation. He was to sleep little, read the *Qur'an*, keep awake all night and not fall asleep over his reading. He was told to eat very little and 'not to go in for a variety of eatables.'[8] These are all preliminaries for initiates on the *Sufi tariqat*. Abdul tells us in an interview with Narasimhaswami in 1936 that he followed all these instructions to the letter. He was to meditate on what he read and also upon his master. In later years when money was flowing into Shirdi and large sums of rupees were often redistributed by Sai Baba to many of the devotees living in Shirdi, including *Sufis* like Bade Baba, Abdul was never included in this largesse. He, along with Mhalsapati, another longtime friend and devotee of Sai Baba, was kept strictly on the path of poverty. Abdul told Narasimhaswami that 'Sai Baba's blessings to me were very strange and sometimes concealed in abuse and violence.'[9] Abdul's rewards were evidently not to be temporal but spiritual, and Sai Baba told him: 'I have enabled you to cross the ocean [of *samsara*]....your earth, i.e. mud body, has been turned into gold.'[10]

The fact that Abdul received spiritual guidance of a Muslim nature from Sai Baba is evident when Sai Baba called upon him to read from the large copy of the *Qur'an* in his presence (*see* Plate 23). Baba would elucidate points concerning Islamic theology and history and explain *Sufi* schools and other related matters. On December 8, 1936, Abdul recalled for Narasimhaswami:

> I read Koran [sic] near him in the mosque. Baba occasionally opened the Koran and made me read passages at which he opened the book....I went on writing down what Baba was uttering. This is the book which contains the gracious utterings of Baba. Everything which fell from his lips is sacred.[11]

Abdul told Narasimhaswami that as far as he knew he was the only Muslim devotee to have read the *Qur'an* in the presence of Sai Baba, although he acknowledged that he was not aware of everything that happened in the *masjid*, as he was often away doing his everyday tasks. Abdul then wrote down some of Sai Baba's utterances and explanations which he regarded as sacred, and over the years these notes accumulated into a small volume. It is probably safe to say that there must have been a great deal of explanation and teaching that did not get recorded by Abdul due to lack of memory, lack of writing skills, or lack of full understanding of what Sai Baba had said.

After the death of Sai Baba this old notebook manuscript became very precious to Abdul as he made use of it, according to Narasimhaswami, as a 'Book of Prophecy' or 'Book of Oracles', through which Sai Baba's message and guidance could be obtained. This type of prophecy is well known in *Sufi* circles and is termed *falnama*. Abdul recalled for Narasimhaswami:

> I make use of this record in the following way. By Baba's blessings, I have full faith in what he has said guiding me and everyone aright. When any one wished to know about the future or other unseen and unknown matter, he comes to me and states the problem. Then I reverently consult this book of Baba's utterances and the answer that comes out of the page opened comes out correct. This has been tried and proved many times. This gift of prophecy is due to Baba's grace.[12]

Thus having full faith in Sai Baba's guidance, Abdul would clairvoyantly open the book at random and read, and it is reported that the resulting message almost invariably proved to be helpful to the petitioner.

Narasimhaswami, in his research for his biography, *Life of Sai Baba*, interviewed Abdul on at least two occasions, and these interviews were subsequently published in full in *Devotees' Experiences of Sri Sai Baba*.[13] The first occasion was on December 8, 1936 when Abdul spoke of how he came to be with Sai Baba; the second occasion was on March 10, 1938. In the interviews carried out in the Marathi language, Abdul refers to events scattered throughout the nearly fifty-year period that he had lived in Shirdi, at the time of the interview.[14] Narasimhaswami did not speak or read Marathi, so he must have relied on a translator during his conversations with Abdul. Abdul evidently showed part of his notebook to the Swami on both occasions and in his editing of the first conversation Narasimhaswami suggests that the topics it covered were prayers to Maruti, and 'recitals of *avataras* of God dovetailing Mahommed and numerous others with the Hindu *Das Avatar*.'[15] In the second interview more than a year later Narasimhaswami added that the written scripts included the Marathi and Urdu languages. Narasimhaswami's native language was Tamil, and while he knew English he was not familiar with either Urdu or Marathi.

In January 1991, the author obtained a copy of Abdul's manuscript through the auspices of Mr V.B.Kher, a Shirdi Sai Baba devotee in Bombay, who had contacts with the Shri Sai Baba Shirdi *Sansthan* (Trust). V.B. Kher was a Trustee of the *Sansthan* during the years 1984-89, and in that capacity he had access to the silk-wrapped notebook which had lain in a safe place in the *Sansthan* after Abdul's death in 1954 [see Appendix D]. Kher used information from the notebook for his own book co-authored with M.V. Kamath, entitled *Sai Baba of Shirdi, a Unique Saint*.[16] In a personal communication to me dated 18 March 1991, Kher said:

> As regards Abdul's Manuscript. I have given you a complete copy of the original which was tied up in a piece of cloth as all historical documents especially *pothis* [sacred texts] used to be tied up. The bundle had not been opened since Abdul's passing away in 1954. The page numbering was done by me so that there may not be any misplacement of the original order of sequence of pages while handling or zeroxing of the MS.

The note-book was old, and evidently was in poor physical condition, having been consulted and handled over a good many years as a Book of Prophecy by Abdul. Kher told me that the disintegration of the note-book was accelerated due to the fact that the paper, ink and binding were of poor quality causing the pages to fall out or fall apart with age. With permission from the *Sansthan*, Kher decided to photocopy the work, but the pages were so frail that he could not find a xerox machine operator who would undertake to copy it due to the danger of its further disintegration. Then he found a printer who also declined at first to copy it as it would be so time-consuming and expensive to wrap each page carefully in see-through plastic prior to copying. However, when the printer realised the spiritual value and nature of the text, he set his men to work wrapping each of the 137 pages prior to photocopying. He made not only one photocopy but also several extra copies, to which he added attractive and sturdy covers and a large spiral binding. He presented Kher with a number of copies, declining any payment as he regarded this service as a sacred undertaking and his spiritual duty. As a result, years later, when I asked Kher if there was any possibility of my seeing the manuscript and obtaining a transcript, he had an extra copy in his possession which he graciously gifted to me. In the same spirit, he would not accept payment from me.

The photocopy of the manuscript in my possession comprises 137 pages, although a few of these pages seem to be little more than scribble or doodlings. When these are discounted and about 25 pages of scrawly *Modi* script[17] are set aside, we are left with a basic manuscript of just over 100 pages of readable notes in Urdu.

The manuscript pages were not good clean originals to start with, and the photocopy reflects this, but the copies are mostly readable. Where the original ink or writing was faint, this, of course, reflects in the copies especially near the edge of pages, and sometimes words and lines are just not decipherable, and so are lost. The whole manuscript looks like a typical student's note-book, with bits of scribble and half-finished sentences interspersed with pages of serious notation. On the whole the manuscript largely pertains to Muslim and *Sufi* material in Deccani Urdu.[18] There are a number of quotations in Arabic included from the *Qur'an* and *hadith*. The full manuscript has not been previously translated into English or published so far by the *Sansthan*, although Kher had abstracted some information from the note-book for his own book. The fact that the manuscript's Islamic nature does not fit in with the accepted Hindu interpretation and presentation of Sai Baba may explain why it has remained unpublished by the *Sansthan*. For the purposes of this book and to remind ourselves that these are the sacred words of Sai Baba, Abdul being merely the scribe, we have named it the *Saibaba Manuscript*. The full English translation is given in the next chapter.

After an initial look at the text, an important discovery was made concerning the ordering of the pages. The book-binding material had long ago disintegrated leaving most of the pages loose. As the pages were not numbered in the original notebook and as it was used over many years as a Book of Prophecy, there was no way of knowing their original order. So, when it came to be photocopied, each page was assigned a circled number to ensure that no pages were missed in the process. The pages had been numbered according to the English and Marathi convention, from front to back, starting with the top page as number one. This made sense as the first few pages were in scrawled Marathi language, in both *Devanagari* and *Modi* script, although the rest of the book is in the Urdu script, which in book form is read the opposite way - from back to front. Once this was taken into consideration, a copy was pulled apart and reordered and the sense of the translation proceeded much more smoothly. As will be seen in the printed translation, new numbers have been assigned to the pages with the original circled number given in parenthesis [K]. The original has been left as close as possible to the initial order in which I received it, except the Urdu pages are reversed. At this point, the absolutely correct order of the pages will never be known since Abdul alone knew its true sequence.

Abdul described the notebook in his conversations with Narasimhaswami as being notes taken while Sai Baba explained portions of the *Qur'an*. As a result, one would expect it to contain Muslim religious language rather than Hindu terminology. And indeed this is the case, the translation of the full text shows that it mostly comprises Muslim and *Sufi* nomenclature, including lists of names of important devotional *Sufi* divines throughout the ages from all different *Sufi* orders. It further contains basic Islamic history and teachings, such as the listing of the five times a day *namaz* (prayer); *fajr, zuhr, asr, maghrib* and *isha*. Also included are the teachings of the *Sufi tariqat*, the spiritual hierarchy of saints, early Muslim history and its significant founders, *Sufi* genealogies (*silsilas*), and a list of Hindu *avataras*. While Narasimhaswami identified a list of Hindu *avatars*, he generalized commenting 'quite obviously Sri Sai Baba and following him Abdul, revere the Hindu *avatars*, Maruti etc., and pray to them'[19]. One can also view this in the light of accommodating Hindu ideas as illustrated by the *Sufi* poet-mystics. The translation reveals that the major portion of the text comprises Muslim and *Sufi* ideas, with lists of significant *Sufi* divines and their orders.

After the death of Sai Baba, Abdul's duties changed as he became the custodian of the shrine of Sai Baba, responsible for its cleaning, flower decoration ritual offerings, etc. (*see* Plate 24 which is a painting to be found in Abdul's house depicting him in the role of a *pirzada* looking after the *dargah*. Plate 25 shows flowers and garlands still placed with devotion on the tomb up to this day). According to Ramalingaswamy, up to 1922, 'Shri Abdul Baba was the then only local leading devotee of Baba.'[20]

Any food given as an offering (*prasad*) by devotees became his provenance, and he lived on the monetary gifts (*daksina)* offered by Sai Baba's devotees.[21] In 1922, however, a Hindu devotee, Hari Sitaram Dixit, visited Shirdi and decided that Sai Baba's shrine was not being cared for in a proper 'Hindu' way, and proceeded to set up a Public Trust through the Ahmednagar District Court to administer the shrine. Abdul's authority was thereby overruled, and he was persuaded by well-wishers to challenge the court ruling and file a counter-suit declaring that he was the legal heir to Sai Baba and that the Public Trust was illegal. He lost his case and as a result, was debarred from having any connection with the maintenance of the shrine at that time. He was refused free food and had to leave the room reserved for him in the shrine. At a later date these severe restrictions were relaxed and Abdul continued to play a role in the maintenance of Sai Baba's shrine until his death. However, the overall result was that, starting in 1922, any Muslim claim to Sai Baba's shrine was effectively silenced by the Hindus.[22]

In the early days Sai Baba's tomb-shrine was kept very simple, as already indicated from the early photographs. Initially there was only a photograph of Sai Baba and while Abdul was active, the tomb was essentially retained in this style for decades. Later, when Abdul became older, and his authority lessened with the fact that the majority of visitors were Hindu, it gradually became more ornate, the picture became larger with an ornamental umbrella installed over it and an *OM* sign appeared along with the words *Shri Sai Baba* on top (*see* Plate 26). Then, two years before Abdul's death in 1954, the *Sansthan* installed a lifesize marble *murti* (statue) of Sai Baba behind the tomb, sitting on an elaborate silver chair, his right leg over the left (*see* Plate 27. Note that the windows have now been covered up). Instead of a tomb or *dargah*, the area began to take on the appearance of a Hindu altar with the large marble statue of Sai Baba placed like a Hindu deity sitting on a silver throne with foot-stool, placed immediately behind the *samadhi*, which then became incidental to the statue as the focus of devotion.. Rahim Khan, the grandson of

Abdul, personally informed me that Shirdi was always frequented by innumerable *faqirs* in the past, but they abruptly ceased to come after the statue was installed in 1952, two years before his grandfather passed away. He sadly declared, 'No *faqirs* come here any more.' Anthropomorphic representation of the divine is not condoned in either Sunni Islam or Sufism, and the large marble statue of Sai Baba is probably the main reason for the lack of Muslims and itinerant *Sufis* going to pay their respects at the Shirdi shrine today.[23]

Abdul Baba (as he later became known) survived Sai Baba by thirty-six years, but he still felt he was under the protection and guidance of Sai Baba throughout those years. In 1927, as he was reciting the *Qur'an* in the old mud house of the then deceased devotee, Ramakrishna Ayi, three walls suddenly collapsed half burying Abdul, but he survived unscathed.[24] Abdul passed away in 1954 and is buried in the precincts of what is now called the *Samadhi Mandir* of Sai Baba, near the *Lendi Bagh* (garden). His is the only Muslim *mazar* or tomb in the Sai Baba Mandir complex, other than Sai Baba's. Abdul's tomb is unmistakably Muslim, having all the characteristics of a Maharashtrian *Sufi dargah*, with a large mound, underneath which the body lies, and over this is spread a green or saffron cloth known as a *gilaf*. Fresh flowers are placed daily upon it (*see* Plate 28 also with railings and high mound). His original small dwelling-house is located opposite the *chavadi*, the main room of which is preserved as his memorial, and visitors can go and pay homage to the memory of Abdul. Abdul's grandson, Rahim Khan, acts as a guardian of the memorial, which is full of pictures, photographs and memorabilia (*see* Plate 29 showing Rahim Khan as the custodian, and note the Islamic pictures on the wall at the top).

Three Urdu specialists have examined the notebook manuscript on my behalf, and have helped to translate it. Dr. Rizwan Malik, while in Toronto, made an initial translation of the *Saibaba MS* from the Urdu.[25] This translation was then taken to India and shown to Azam Ali Sufi in Aurangabad, Maharashtra, who was able to bring to the translation a more specifically Deccani *Sufi* understanding. Azam Ali Sufi's antecedents helped to qualify him for this task, for his grandfather, Syed Azam Ali Sufi Azam, was a great *Sufi* saint with thousands of disciples, and bore the title of *Qutb-e-Daccan*. Sufi Azam was known for his special *karamat* (miraculous power) of granting children to childless couples, much like Sai Baba himself. In an overall assessment of the *Saibaba MS*, Azam Ali Sufi affirmed that Sai Baba was fully conversant with the *Qur'an* and *hadith* and that the text exhibits a comprehensive knowledge of Sufism. He could not isolate, from the wording in the manuscript, any particular *Sufi* order to which Sai Baba may have belonged, as all aspects of Islam and Sufism are mentioned, including lists of the prominent masters of the various *Sufi* orders. He felt that Sai Baba was evidently concerned with the uplift of the whole world, and his mission was larger than merely sitting in a remote rural village for the sole benefit of a few devotees.[26] Further support of this assertion was given by Meher Baba who claimed that in 1927, although he appeared to be doing nothing, in fact it was Sai Baba who controlled the Great War (World War I, 1914-1918), and brought about its termination.[27] Munsiff also noted Sai Baba's behaviour during the period of World War I, which coincided with the last four years of Sai Baba's life. He wrote:

> *Arati* was usually performed midway between the two places [the *masjid* and *chavadi*], and on such occasions Baba's face always shone with a peculiar lustre and radiance which was noticeable to all. In this condition he used to make signs in the air with his fingers and this unique and strange feature of his behaviour continued regularly throughout the period that the European War lasted. In this respect it is also significant that the end of Sai Baba's physical existence on earth synchronises with the termination of the War in 1918.[28]

The third person to examine the *Saibaba MS* was Mr. Amrit Bahal who qualified in law from India, and who currently is associated with the Law Offices in Toronto, Canada, specializing in the interpretation and translation of legal documents in Indian languages, including Urdu.

The consensus of all three Urdu specialists is that the manuscript is what it purports to be, namely a notebook of names, key words and phrases, jotted down while listening to someone expounding on the topic of the *Qur'an*, Islamic history or the *Sufi* path. Quotations in Arabic from the *Qur'an* are noted in a number of places. All agree that there is little continuity of thought, being mere random jottings on a variety of Islamic and *Sufi* topics, and they all concur that there is a lack of organisation in the presentation of the ideas, and that the photocopied manuscript is not easy to decipher.

An English translation of the *Saibaba MS* is given in the next chapter.[29] The script-writer has written in a mixed language consisting of Urdu, Persian and Arabic, with some writing in an old Marathi script called *Modi* which is not written or understood today. The pages containing *Modi* script are few, and they are scrawled in loose hand-writing and poor letter formation, to the point of being almost indecipherable. So far as the main body of the Urdu text is concerned, even this Urdu, according to Mr Bahal, is not plain literal Urdu, but a Deccani Urdu.[30] In a number of places the spellings are not in accordance with those given in the standard dictionary, such as Dr. Abdul Haq's Urdu-English Dictionary.[31] Mixed in with it, there is a touch of the local dialect of Maharashtra. The actual quality of the script in Urdu is poor for a major portion of the manuscript - the sentences are incomplete, the verbs are often missing, and the meaning is unclear. There are also grammatical and spelling errors, which indicate that the standard of literacy of the script-writer was not even up to the average. The notebook consists of random thoughts and dictations written down. Consistency is missing in a substantial portion of the document. Taking all these shortcomings of the original into consideration, a reconstruction of some segments of the *Saibaba MS* has been attempted.

Through the auspices of V.B. Kher, a few years ago, Dr G.V. Divekar undertook a Marathi translation of the Urdu Manuscript, which was published in Mumbai (Bombay). Kher at the same time requested that he also prepare a literal transliteration of the text from Urdu to Devanagari script. Just prior to the publication of this book, Kher discovered some discrepancies of translation between my English version and the Marathi version of Dr. Divekar. On sitting down together in Mumbai in 1997, we discovered that Dr. Divekar had in fact used a lot of 'licence' in his attempt to interpret and make sense of the more obscure parts of the original. Using the Devanagari script transliteration, Mr. Kher and I were able to further refine the text in the spirit of Sai Baba's teaching while sticking closely to the literal translation. I am indebted to V.B. Kher for his continued interest and help in the preparation of this English translation. He, like myself, regards the work as a labour of love.

The translation is given in this book in order to reveal and establish the extensive and comprehensive nature of Sai Baba's knowledge of Islam, Sufism and the *Sufi tariqat*. The overall assessment by the translators of this *Saibaba MS* is that it gives every indication that Sai Baba had a good knowledge of the *Qur'an*, the history of Islam and its sects, and more importantly the essence of Sufism, its teaching and significant masters.

NOTES

1. Herein referred to as *Saibaba MS*.
2. Nanded is a town in North-east Maharashtra.
3. DE, p. 143.
4. DE, p. 143.
5. SS, 22:157-158.
6. Bandra is a suburb of Bombay where the main slaughter house is located. SS, 22:107.
7. SS, 22: 157-169.
8. DE, p. 145.
9. DE. p. 146.
10. LSB, III:175.
11. DE, p. 143.
12. DE, p. 143.
13. Originally published in three parts, Madras: All India Sai Samaj, now printed as one volume, Hyderabad: Akhanda Sainama Sapthaha Samithi, 1989.
14. He would continue to live there until his death in 1954 - making a total of 65 years.

15. DE, p. 144.
16. Kher's articles were published in the *Shri Sai Leela* magazine, an organ of the Sansthan which was instituted only a few years after the demise of Sai Baba. A list of V.B. Kher articles is given in the Bibliography. His wife, Mrs. Indira Kher, a retired English Professor, was on the editorial board of the magazine from around 1980, and editor from 1985-87.
17. *Modi* is an old script for Marathi which is no longer used. Mr G.V. Divekar of Bombay was able to translate a few of the odd words and jottings in Modi script, and this is given in the next chapter.
18. DE, p. 147.
19. DE, p. 144.
20. Ramalingaswamy, *Ambrosia in Shirdi*, p. 176.
21. This was said to amount to four to five thousand rupees.
22. Ramalingaswamy, *Ambrosia in Shirdi*, p. 176.
23. This generalization excludes Muslim devotees of Sri Sathya Sai Baba who visit the shrine.
24. LSB, III:175.
25. Rizwan Malik has since qualified as a Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Toronto.
26. Personal taped interview.
27. C.B. Purdom, *The Perfect Master - Shri Meher Baba* (London: Williams & Norgate Ltd., 1937), p. 108.
28. Munsiff, *Hazrat Sai Baba of Shird*", p. 56.
29. I am indebted to Mr. Amrit Bahal for the following comments on the languages used in the *Saibaba MS*, the quality of the script, the quality of Urdu grammar used and comments on the content of the English translation.
30. Personal communication with Mr. Bahal.
31. Dr. Abdul Haq, *Urdu-English Dictionary*, New Delhi: Star Publications Private Ltd., 1993.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

English Translation of the Saibaba Ms

As described in the previous chapter, I was privileged to obtain a copy of Abdul's notebook, a rare, previously unpublished manuscript, being Abdul's notes and jottings of the words and teachings that he received from Sai Baba. The notebook was originally written in Urdu, and I had it translated into English by several Urdu specialists, and for the purpose of this book I have named it the *Saibaba manuscript* (*MS*). When the photocopied manuscript came into my hands, a hand-written number had already been ascribed to each page by Mr. Kher, in order to facilitate the xeroxing and binding process. The numbering was started on the first page of the manuscript and then forward in the manner of a normal English or Marathi book. As Urdu is read the opposite way to an English book - from back to front - the pages had to be re-ordered for the translation as the main body of the text is in Urdu. The page number given on the far left in bold font is my own page numbering, which starts from the back of the book to the front, and Mr. Kher's original page numbering follows in square brackets, preceded by the letter K.

This English translation from the Urdu, is a literal translation. As the original pages were mere notes, there are many unreadable parts, gaps, unfinished thoughts, unfinished lists etc. Such lack of organization is only to be expected in a notebook never intended for publication. This is combined with time's effect on the paper and ink, placing limitations on the quality of the xeroxing. So it is very tempting for the translator to fill in the gaps and round out the thought. However, we have tried NOT to do this, particularly as few people today can read the original in Deccani Urdu. What is here is the literal translation of what is actually there. Naturally any translator wants to make his work understandable, but inevitably he brings to the interpretation some of his personal background. Thus, for the purposes of this book, we let the reader see what is literally there - word by word. Out of the total 137 pages, there are 28 pages in *Modi* script, a very old short-hand version of Marathi in a script not read today. For the most part these pages in *Modi* are incomprehensible scribble, and very few people today can decipher this script. However, Dr. G.V. Divekar was able to read parts of these pages, and found letter alphabets, stanzas, numbers, odd words, spells and incantations, as well as frequent reference to Sai Baba. For example, on page 136 [K2] there is written *Sai Jai Sai*, on page 81 [K57] *Sai Baba* is written many times, followed by *Come and Uplift us, Oblige us Oblige us*. On page 24 [K114] is written *Fall at the Feet of Sai Baba*, and on page 8 [K130] is *Sai rakho Sai rakho* meaning 'O protect us O Sai Please accept our salutations to you'. *Krupakaro Maharaj,* meaning 'have compassion on us Sai, we are your slaves'. It is impossible to give any cogent translation. Divekar suggests that this whole notebook including the rest of the 109 pages giving brief references to Islamic dharma, *fiqr, dharmasastras, hadis, Sufi* tenets, various math, schools of Sufism and other associated subjects, is not so much a work of philosophy but rather should be seen as a text, used after Sai Baba's demise as a Book of Predictions called in Urdu a *Falnama*. It is said that only an expert in *Falnama* can interpret the meaning or give predictions contained therein. When the intellect is stunned the intuition or clairvoyance can come to the fore. Abdul would put the feather of a peacock into the book and whatever page was opened at random, he would interpret the writing for his prediction. Evidently, Tulsidas' *Ramayana* has been used in the same way. According to Y.M.Pathan, such a collection of letters, alphabets, stanzas and utterances of a holy man in Urdu, Arabic or Persian is called *Paigambar mata* - and was used to predict auspicious events (*Mahanubhav Sahitya*, Vol.1, pp. 57-63).

While the use of this notebook as a Book of Predictions is beyond our mandate, it is valuable to us in another way. From the perspective taken in this book, the significance of the *Saibaba MS* is that it establishes beyond doubt that Sai Baba was totally familiar with both the Islamic and *Sufi* traditions, and that as a *Sufi* master he taught this tradition to Abdul, who was his *murid*.

SAIBABA MANUSCRIPT

Pages:

1-8. [K137-130] [Very damaged pages with odd jottings in *modi* script]

9. [K129] [This is the first page of the Urdu text] *Bismilla al-Rahman al-Rahim*
In the name of *Allah* the most beneficent and merciful
Ya Haqq, ya Paighambar, *ya Rasul*. O God this is the place of Paigambar. O messenger.
pirs: 1. [not readable]
2. Imam Husain
3. Hazrat Sambul
4. Hazrat Khwaja
Salah (written 4 times)
Mohammed. Ya Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki... ya Khwaja Mu'inuddin Chishti - Emperor of India. Parada Ahmed.

10. [K128] [The first two lines are written in Arabic - a quotation from the *Qur'an*]
In the name of *Allah* the most beneficent and merciful.
Allah... Husain... Love of Husain - Fatima
First perform my work repeating the name of *Allah*, thereafter, like riding a horse, I will take you there.
[There is an Arabic prayer.] You are the listener to our prayers.
You are the deity of Worlds.
We worship you and seekYour help.
With Your blessings, O greatest of Mercifuls.

11. [K127] [The upper half of the page is in Arabic and in the lower portion reference has been made to the Hindu gods,

Brahma and Vishnu who has taken 10 incarnations, the different names of *Allah*, and *mantra* and *tantra.*]
Hazrat Imam Hasan. Husain is the first and last Mehdi.

12. [K126] In the name of *Allah* the most beneficent and merciful.
The religious emotion is purely spiritual. Only secondarily it relates to the material world. O Parvardigar! - Universal Sustainer. O God! O Habib! - My Beloved What we see in this material state is not real because you cannot understand it through the intellect or by inference. Those who consider the spirit as without beginning, this opinion is incorrect because thinking itself is not permanent. And life is the real thing. The body is subordinate to it...[last two lines are not clear]

13. [K125] [Copy of page 9]

14. [K124] To understand the true form of God is difficult. In the *Qur'an* it is forbidden to picture God with form. If you walk on the path of righteousness, then you will not feel the need for it. It requires great effort to walk on the path [of righteousness] i.e. *tapas*. When a person practices *tapas* (*riyajat*), divine insight (*ma'rifa)* will automatically come. A *sura* from the *Qur'an* says something to this effect, *Ajjain jahidu fina tabulana riyajat* - He who performs *tapas*, I regard him to be on the path. It would not be proper to give him full knowledge about it. But before you proceed on the path of *Allah*, you must discipline the mind. It is strategic to strengthen the defences, with fortifications. If an army does not move how can the war of righteousness be fought. O dear friend! Know this that the body is the kingdom of the heart. Do not think that the heart has many armies. The *Qur'an* says: *Maya alam rabbuk janud ilahu* - The army of *Allah*, do not think that it has to beseige the mind/heart. The heart is created for the realization of God. To find the way to attaining a vision of God is a man's true task. For the vision of God, divine sight is necessary.

15-16. [K123-122] [This appears to be a two page copy of the well-known Arabic *durud* or prayer from the *Qur'an* which is recited to pay respects to the Prophet Mohammed. It is signed by:] Pirzadah Syed Noor. Syed Amin Khandhar, presently a scribe in an Urdu school at Shirdi.

17. [K121] [This page is all in Arabic, and is a supplicatory prayer (*du'a)*, including the *Fatiha* from the *Qur'an*. It is incomplete.]

18. [K120] [This page is all in Arabic.]
[On this page is the *Tajnama* and prayers (*du'as)* as per *Shi'i* and *Sunni* schools of thought, indicating an equal reverence to both. Prayers have been offered to *Allah* and his various names, praying that he should save man from sins and satanic (evil) tendencies. The names of *Allah* are given]

19. [K119] [This page has Arabic verses from the *Qur'an* - *Fatiha* (1st *sura*) and a few verses from the second *sura*.]

20. [K118] [The meaning is the same as page 12 [K126], but written at a different time, and longer by 4-5 lines]
In the name of *Allah* the most beneficent and merciful.
Religious emotion in full is purely spiritual. It is not material. Secondly it means that you will see the world as material or as only relatively real (until you have a vision of God). Parvardigar! O Dear One!, O Dear One! the material (relative state) world is unreal. There is no place for intellect and inference. Those who regard the spirit as without beginning, this is not true. It is wrong to address the spirit because it is dependent on others. The real form of man is *prana* - life force. The body is under the control of *prana*. The people who equate the spirit with the body are wrong. The body is impermanent. Animals also have a spirit which is also impermanent, called *dil* or heart which seeks the mercy of God.

21. [K117] [The ideas on this page are almost the same as on page 20.[K118]]

22. [K116] [This is the same as page 14 [K124]]
It is difficult to know the true reality (*haqiqa)* or realize God (*ma'rifa)*. The Islamic religious law (*shari'a*) does not permit any further probe into reality because it is beyond comprehension. We have to work hard on the Islamic religious path. Those who follow spiritual practices automatically have the realization of God (*ma'rifa)*. Before efforts are put in, one should understand one's thought processes. How can one progress? The body is the kingdom of the heart and in this kingdom, there is something opposite to the mind.
[There is an Arabic quotation:]
Whoever has made efforts with a truthful heart, for the world hereafter, he has created a true path. He looks for a witness for God's works. This witness depends on true knowledge of God.

23-26. [K115-112] [These pages have scraps of *modi* script]

27. [K111] In the name of *Allah* most beneficent and merciful.
Allah says: We have created spirits *(jinns*) and man only for the purpose of worship. We have granted him the kingdom and the strength to conquer it. We have also given him the body, hands and feet, with the intention that he should enrich this world. In this way he repays our debt and becomes our true devotee. In this way, like the Emperor, he serves the world and Allah.

28. [K110] *Buddhi* - intellect should be recognized as a *wazir* (Prime Minister). Similarly the body, that is hands, feet etc., are the servants. The heart should be regarded as the treasurer - so greed and envy should be allotted the work of espionage, so that you will be able to know the information about the theft of wealth, and you will be able to attain your purpose. See the brain of the man is divided into two parts, front and back. The front portion receives the messages, so it is regarded as the reporter or the transmitter of information. The back portion is regarded as the protector of what is received - like a telegraph officer or editor. [You should entrust or make proper use of various organs and senses. And in the front portion of the brain is the power of thinking and analysing, while the back portion is memory.]

29. [K109] The *wazir* governs the administration of the kingdom and makes all the decisions and arrangements. The *buddhi* - intellect should be regarded as a *wazir* of the Emperor, the mind. He should be able to control those conspiring against him. He has to be alert to who is rebellious. Likewise the intellect has to be ever vigilant to those enemies who wage war against the moral kingdom. [The six enemies are anger, greed, jealousy etc.] It must boost the morale of the obedient and put down rebellion so that the kingdom may survive.

30. [K108] One should not befriend evil-minded people. Do not be in league with them to commit theft or deceive others. If one observes this discipline, then the purpose of life is fulfilled. They also are able to win grace of God. On the other hand, if one acts against this one will be regarded as a thief or deceiver and people will regard one with suspicion. And one may also be punished for one's bad conduct. O Dear Friend! There is a part within....

31. [K107] There are certain acts or types of behaviour which destroy all goodness, Good acts form character and raise man's status. There are many types of behavious but four are given here :

1. Animalistic behaviour with traits of lust, anger or greed.
2. Aggressive behaviour like that of a dog, wolf or tiger.
3. Satanic or evil behaviour.
4. Angelic or divine behaviour.

32. [K106] A man who is not virtuous behaves like a satan, but man has the intelligence, the virtue of which he can behave like an angel. Strive always to perfect your knowledge, abjure from evil deeds, wish well to all people, and keep the bad and evil-minded persons at a distance. Live with honour, realizing the greatness of the *nama* (Name of God), always be happy. Know that ignorance, deceit and pretentiousness are vices. Truly speaking human nature is fourfold; dog-like, pig-like, satanic or angelic. A dog is not judged to be bad because of his skin but because of he symbolizes anger, and the pig greed. Man can be morally elevated above animalistic tendencies due to his discrination and intellect.

33. [K105] Nothing is bad because of its form or appearance, but it is bad because of the character which is under the control of desires which are unholy or which reflects animal qualities. It is the character which reflects the true nature, so the qualities of dogs and pigs are present in human nature, which determines whether a man is satanic or angelic. If you come to understand that there is an inner Controller, you come to assess your deeds and find out which of the four above qualities influence and predominate over you. Remember whatever actions you do, the corresponding qualities will develop and will always remain a part of you. These qualities constitute the core of morality and all these qualities will be according to the order of the one in command.

34. [K104] If you triumph over lust and anger they will not be able to keep you under their control. Then man has been commanded to keep the dog of greed and the pig of lust under control and subject them to the control of the discrimination. If a man does this, his character will enjoy the state of bliss. On the contrary if he comes under the control of vices, he will be totally ruined.

35. [K103] If a man is shown his true character he will see that he is standing with his hands tied before a pig, a dog or a satan (under the influence of the animal qualities of greed, rage or evil). If a *musulman* is made to stand before a *kafir* (a non-believer), the non-believer will torture him. An angel if he is subjected to a dog or a satan he will suffer far worse than the suffering meted out to a muslim by a non-believer.

36. [K102] If the external appearance is in conformity with the internal being, and if desires, such as greed are in the ascendant, that man will resemble a pig. And if anger is predominant, that man will look like a wolf. If you see this in a dream, note that man is like a tyrant.

37. [K101] If the appearance is under the control of the character then it will reflect what is within. If you realize that there is an inner Controller, then review your actions and way of living, and decide which of the four tendencies are predominant in you. Those qualities will arise in you according to the actions you perform and will always be your companions and these qualities arise according to the one who commands.

38. [K100] If you tie the pig of vices, then contentment, fear of God, humility, wisdom, goodness and meekness will arise in you. If you become a slave of the dog of vices, then insolence, impurity, pride, boastfulness, ego, false humility, regarding others as inferior, and keeping close to base types of people will become a part of your character. If you keep this dog under control, then success, honour, greatness and forgiveness will arise in you, and all these good qualities will be your companions till the last.

39. [K99] Vices, such as deceiving others, betrayal, embezzlement, insincerity, producing cheap shoddy goods, cunning, being devious in your dealings, unrighteous behaviour, destroying the faith of others, not being true to yourself, self-deceit (suppression of the conscience), all can overpower a man. Do not be under their control, triumph over them. If you truly discriminate - then wisdom, knowledge, learning, ingenuity, ability, good conduct, caring for the welfare of others, perseverance - all these good qualities will arise in you and will keep you company until the end of your life and will serve you well. Those actions which produce bad habits are called vices.

40. [K98] Light is like a clean mirror, one can see oneself. Bad habits are like the smoke or darkness which obscures the heart. But on the Day of Judgment in a new age, there will be a voice from heaven. Guard yourself and protect your virtue from the Doomsday. Good qualities are the light which sway the heart and destroy the stain and the feeling of guilt in you.

41. [K97] [Page divided into half by 2 horizontal lines down the middle.]

In the name of *Allah* most beneficent and merciful.

1. From Needa - Aneeda
   From Aneeda - Shunya (void)
   From Shunya - Shana (restraint)
   From Shana - Gyana (Jnana, ilm, knowledge)
2. You are first Nama - Adhun - Adhunkar
   From Adhun - Adhunkar - Omkar
   From Omkar - Bhavakar (samsara)
   From Bhavakar - Adi
   From Adi - Aloka (Alakh)
   From Alakh - Niranjana

42. [K96] [Page divided and the printing is poor]

1. From Kuya - Hariparva
   From Hariparva - Anada (food)
   From Anada - Jiva
   From Jiva - Avigata
   From Avigata - Autastha Dharma
   From Autastha Dharma - [blank]
2. Teja (effulgence) - Kamala (lotus)
   From Kamala - Kardama (mind)
   From Kardama - Aubud
   From Aubud - Tsava (gaja elephant?)
   From Tsava - [blank]

43. [K95] [From pages 43-47 the names of great Hindu sages and deities are given]

1. Jamarik (Yama)
   From Jamarik - Bhagarik (Bhrigu - Preceptor of the gods)
   From Bhagarik - Vichhayat
   From Vichhayat - [Blank]
2. From Kamdu - Ootaru
   From Ootaru - Poorabu
   From Poorabu - Pirsima Rakeesa
   From Pirsima Rakeesa - Kaccha avatar
   From Kaccha avatar - Machha avatar
   From Machha avatar - Manayat Asmitra
   From Manayat Asmitra - [Blank]

44. [K94] [Page divided] [This page gives names of some Vedic sages and Hindu gods etc. A good portion of the page is unclear]

1. Dhadhbar; Khismar; Varaha; Khuvi; Khilipa; Gotaram (Gautama); Vishnu; Haritaka.
2. Sirinabak rikhi (Triambak rishi?)
   From Kachha avatar - Vuchhayat
   From Vuchhayat - Mahayat
   [Blank]

45. [K93] [Page divided] [This page gives the names of Hindu sages and deities]

1. Mandhata
   From Vaisirin (Vaishravan) Jamadagni
   From Jamadagni - Parasuram avatar
   From Parasuram - Raja Yayati
   From Yayati - Kanva
   [Blank]
2. Narasimha avatar - Shesha
   From Shesha - Revak
   From Revak - Bandavista
   From Bandavista - Vihalochan
   From Vihalochan - Kashyapa
   From Kashyapa - Vaman avatar

46. [K92] [Page divided] [This page gives a list of the succession line of Hindu kings of the past. The names are reproduced as written.]

1. From Raja Dasaratha - Ramachandra avatar
   From Ramachandra avatar Ankusha
   From Anksuha - Padma Purusha
   From Padma Pursusha - [Blank]
2. From Ajodarath - Jayadrarath
   From Jayadrarath - Shoorsena
   From Soorsena - Vasudeva
   From Vasudeva - Shri Krishna
   From Shri Krishna - Pratimadan (Pradyumana)
   From Pradyumana - Anurdhanja [Blank]

47. [K91] [This page is divided into two parts. Both the portions give names of Hindu divine incarnations. The left portion is somewhat indecipherable but names of divine incarnations such as Maccha, Kaccha, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, Parasurama, Ram, Krishna and Kalki are clearly decipherable. The right half side is translated thus:]

Jali (water) *avatar* and then Thali (land) *avatar*. After this, there was the Brahmin Vamana and then the Rajput (Rama), then Gavli (Krishna) and then Musalmans. In the subloka all the people were indifferent. There were four *avatars* in *krita yuga* (Matsya, Kurna, Varaha and Narasimha) and three *avataras* in the *treta* (Vamana, Parasurama and Rama) and two *avataras* in *dwapara yuga* (Krishna and Balarama). Thereafter two *avatars* Shesha and Kalanki are listed, who are referred to in Islam as Mehdi and Alehussalman. After Maccha, Kaccha, Varaha, Narasimha, Parasurama, Krishna, they list Ibrahim, Kalanki, Alehussalman and Buddha.

48. [K90] [Page divided - topic the Remembrance of God - *Namasmarana*]

There is only one God and Mohammed is his messenger. If you perform *upasana* (pray to God) according to the way prescribed, then only *Allah* will accept it. For this alone the *Vedas* and *Qur'an* have been given.

1. In thousands of yugas... [unclear]

2. 1. Yussuf 2. Ayub 3. Musa 4. Alehussalman 5. Isa 6. Ikahu Hazrat Hamja
7. Hazrat Ali 8. Hazrat Meluni Kalandar 9. Imam Husain 10. Taki Naki Khwaja 11. Sultan Bayazid al-Bistami 12. Asad Ahmad Denuri 13. Mansur Abul haq Qureshi Hagarai-jahaj 14. Sayyad Hazrat Abdul Qadar Jadaj.

49. [K89] [Page divided]

1. *Ya hayate kalandar,* Ali Alauddin, Bande Nawaz, Mohammadshah.

There are thousands of *avatars* in the Kaliyuga. The methods of worship for everyone are different. The present Kaliyuga *avatar* is Sai Baba. In this world there are always 10-20 *avatars* of similar kind living at the same time.

2. God's power - do that which suggests itself to you. Many *avatars* have been born in this world and also in the *kaliyuga*. According to the conception of the Hindus from Vedic times, *avatars* rule and exercise great powers.

50. [K88] [Page divided] Left side quite illegible. These names can be made out

1. Abu Adham - Parikshit)king)
From Parikshit - Janmejaya
Ashwattham - Bandarsthani
Dinisadini Sahavre Raja Khallad Allahu Mulkahu

2. Sai Baba, O Sai Baba, has been repeated six times on the right side of the page. Followed by the words Kalag Sharif, Shuhdan ilaha, Hazrat rasul *Allah*

51. [K87] [On pages 51-53 some names of Muslim divines have been given - not very clear]

Yodhahun abu Talib. From Hazrat Maulana Haqq - Hazrat Ali Karam Allahu.

From Hazrat Ali - Hazrat Imsm Hussain Sayyidna Jaid

From Hazrat Sayyidna - Ahmed

From Ahmed - Hazrat Mohammed... [blank]

52. [K86] [This page is divided and gives a line of succession of the Shia Imams... printing not clear]

53. [K85] [List of *kaliphas* according to Sunni Islam]
Ya Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq, Ya haqq, Ya Hazrat Umar.
God is all-kind and all-merciful.
Ya Mohammed. Ya Ali, Ya Fatima, Ya Imam Hasan, Ya Imam Husain, Ya Alehussalam, Ya Hazrat Ajhar, Ya Isra'fil, Ya Hazrat Ali!

54. [K84] [*Qawwali* (Islamic devotional song) in honor of Sai Baba]
Who can sing the praises of our Sai Baba?
Every man is a slave of Sai Baba.
Spirits as well as men are captivated by Sai Baba.
God is our Beloved and takes the name of Sai Baba.
In the two worlds the name of Sai Baba resounds.
Sai Baba embodies the Vedas, as also *Allah*.
We give Sai Baba all honours respectfully saluting and bowing before him.
Sai Baba operates on two planes, in Shirdi and all over the world.
Sai Baba is Supreme in both the present world and the next.
The whole universe is vibrant with Sai Baba.

55. [K83] [*Qawwali* cont:]
If one says 'I do not get a son', Sai Baba can grant him a child.
That is the greatness of Sai Baba.
Even if you are not destined to get a fruit [child]
Whatever Sai Baba says will happen.
It is difficult to understand his deep mysteries
But that is his own idiosyncrasy.
His speech is like that of Maulana Gausul Ajaya Dastgir.
He to whom he gives the *chilim* (pipe), they can command like him.
[i.e. by his blessing they can also perform miracles]

56. [K82] [*Qawwali* cont:]
No one understands his outer aspects
So how can they understand his inner hidden qualities?
Mysterious are the ways of nature.
What capacity has Amir Saheb to talk about the qualities of our Sai Baba?
The *darbar* (audience) of Sai Baba is that of a *qalandar*.
Abdul is a slave of his and he is guided by him as his *murshid* (spiritual Master).

57. [K81] [Arabic quotation for the *Qur'an* but the print is poor]

58-62. [K80-76] [These pages contain scraps of *modi* script]

63. [K75] [The top of the page is in Urdu script, and *modi* script at the bottom]
If you had brought me a 1/4 kilo (*pau)* of the flowers of Daru that would have been better.

64. [K74] [This page has scraps of *modi* script]
[In the first part there is reference to Sunday and Monday and the appearance of the moon.]
[In the second part there is reference to family tree of Moinuddin Chishti] Badshah-e-Hind (The Spiritual Emperor of India)
Khwaja Moinuddin bin Sayidna,
Muvaris bin Sayyid Ghiayasuddin bin Sayidna

65. [K73] The Lord of the two worlds, the Bliss of the whole world, Mohammed - Peace be upon him and the 10 Companions.
[This page gives Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti's family tree, through his mother who was the daughter of Hazrat Ummal Wara, and his grandmother was the daughter of Sayidna Daud bin Sayidna Abdulla Sayidna Hanbali bin Sayidna Muhi Zahid bin Sayyid Murith bin Sayidna Daud bin Sayidna Mousa. Khwaja Sayidna Ghiayas, Sayidna bin Aziz.]
[A large part of the page is not clear.]

66. [K72] In the name of *Allah*, most beneficent and merciful.
Praise God in the beginning and the end. Pay Homage to

Prophet Mohammed. He gave the symbol of the transference of power (*khirqa)* to the Ten Companions of the Prophet:

1. Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq
2. Hazrat Umar Farooq
3. Hazrat Usman Gani
4. Hazrat Ali
5. Sallhu Vajhu Hazrat Zubayr
6. Hazrat Abu Ubayda bin Jurg
7. Hazrat Sa'id
8. Hazrat Sa'ad
9. Hazrat Abdul Rahman

Hazrat Ali bestowed favour on 17 men. They appointed 4 *pirs*, Iman Husain Hazrat Iman Husain Basri, Khwaja Kumayl bin Zaid...[The rest of the names of the *pirs* are not legible]

67. [K71] 7 *Sufi* Orders that developed from these:
1st group - **Kumayliyya** with Kumayl-bin Zaid
2nd group - **Basriyya** with Khwaja Shaykh Basri
3rd group - **Bahariyya** - Khwaja Abdullah Bahari
4th group - **Qalandriyya** - Hazrat Maulana Qalandar
5th group - **Sulaimaniyya** - Hazrat Sulaiman Pharsi
6th group - **Naqshabandiyya** - Hazrat Qasim bin Abu Bakr Siddiq
7th group - **Sarriya** - Khwaja Hasan Sari Saqati
The first *kalipha* was Khwaja Abdul Wahid bin Zaid

68. [K70] [This page gives a list of *khalifas* or *caliphs* (successors)]

There are 14 KHANWADAS or Houses or Sufi Families or Groups formed:

Khwaja Abdul Wahid bin Zayd was followed by 5 Chishti pirs. Khwaja Habib Azmi was succeeded by 9 Qadiri *pirs*.

[Names of Muslim saints who belong to the Chishtiyya family tree, and who founded Orders named after them, have been given]

1. **Zaydiyya** - founded by Khwaja Abdul Wahid bin Zayd.
2. **Iyadiyya** - founded by Khwaja Fazl bin Iyad - *khalifa* of Wahid bin Zayd
3. **Adhamiyya** - founded by Khwaja Ibrahim Adham Balkhi, *khalifa* of Khwaja Fazl bin Iyad.
4. **Hubriyya** - founded by Khwaja Aminuddin Hubrat al-Basra, *khalifa* of Hadiyyat-al-Murssa who was *khalifa* of Khwaja Ibrahim Adham Balkhi.
5. **Chishtiyya** - founded by Khwaja Abu Ishaq Chishti

69. [K69] [This page gives names of the spiritual descendents of Khwaja Abu Ishaq Chishti]

Each bestowed favour on his sucessor:

Khwaja Aminud-din who was the *kalipha* of Sarbtul Basra
Khwaja Abu Muhammed Chisht
Khwaja Abdal Chisht [Abu Ahmad]
Khwaja Abu Yusuf Chisht
Khwaja Mawdud Chisht
Khwaja Usman Harooni Miya
Maulana Sultan ul-Hind
Khwaja Mu'inud-din Chishti of Ajmer - Kudas Sarhu al-Aziz
Khwaja Qutbud-din Baktiyar Kaki
Sheikh Farid Shakarganj
'Ali Alaud-di

70. [K68] [This page gives names of Muslim divines such as Shaykh Nasirud-din Dehlavi, Khwaja Banda Nawaz Bandon, Karim Saloun ya Saheb, Khwaja Nizam-ud-din Aulia, and Khwaja Zar Zari Zar Bakhsh]

[The script then refers to the **Qadiriyya** Khanwada as **KHANWADA I.**]

1. Khwaja Habib Ajami, *khalifa* of Hasan Basri who left 5 *khalifas* including Khwaja Haqiq alias Zafar

Shaykh Fattula... [names not clear]

71. [K67] **KHANWADA 2** - called **Tayfuria *Sufi* Order**

Founded by Abu Yazid Tayfuri Bistami [Bayazid al-Bistami] - *khalifa* of Khwaja Habib Ajami who left 5 *khalifas*:

1. Mashud Shakr Bar
2. Ibrahim Khushtbara
3. Shah Mahmud Hazar Makki
4. Abdullah Makki Alam Bardar
5. Shah Badiuddin Qutb, who is also known as Zandshah Madar

KHANWADA 3: known as Khanwada **Karkhiyya** after Ma'ruf Karkhi

khalifa Khwaja Da'ud Tasi. There were 3 *khalifas*:

1. Khwaja Hasan Sari Saqati
2. Baba Farrukh Tabrazi
3. Abdul Haqq Dehlavi

KHANWADA 4: Started with Khwaja Hasan Sari Saqati, *kalipha* of Khwaja Ibrahim, then 3 *kaliphas*, Abu Hasan Junayd Baghdadi...[names not clear]

72. [K66] **KHANWADA 5**: Started with Khwaja Junayd Baghdadi - **Junaydiyya** whose *khalifa* was Khwaja Hasan Sari Saqati, who appointed 9 *khalifas*:

1. Mumsad Alavi Dinwari
2. Khwaja Abu Bakr Shibli
3. Shah Mahmud
4. Shaykh Rudbari
5. Shaykh Waqak
6. Shah Rumi
7. Shah Muhyiuddin Mansur
8. Shah 'Usman Maghrabi
9. Abu Ishaq Gazruni

KHANWADA 6: Started by Shah Abu Ishaq Gazruni, a *khalifa* of Junayd Baghdadi. He appointed 3 *khalifas*:

1. Shaykh Ahmed Maqbool
2. Shaykh Hamid
3. Shaykh Qutbuddin - Abdul Tartusiya

73. [K65] [This page continues the list of *khalifas*]

KHANWADA 7:

Khwaja Sari Saqati - *khalifa* of Khwaja Abdul Wahid Aziz Yemani
Khalifa of Abu Bakr Shibli - *khalifa* of Junaid Baghdadi
He made Abul-Hasan Qureshi Hangari as his disciple. He was followed by Khwaja Abu-Sayeed Fakhrooi, Janab Sayyad Maulana Muhi-ud-din's son pir Dastogir Womi al-Mubarak and he blessed him in turn, Abdul Qadir Jilani and Sultan Jahan.

KHANWADA 8:
This house was referred to as **Najibiya**. It was started by Khwaja Najibal-Din Kibriya Firdausi.

74. [K64] [The list of successors continues on this page]
Mumsad Ali Dinwari, *khalifa* Kwaja Junayd Baghdadi.
KHANWADA 9: Founded by Shaikh Shihab ud-din Suhrawardi
Silsila 1:
Khalifa Sana-ud-din
Khalifa of Abu Najibu'd-din Umar
Khalifa of Mumsad 'Ali Dinwari
Khalifa of Junayd Baghdadi
Silsila 2:
Shaykh Shihab ud-din Suhrawardi
murid of Piran Dastgir Mahbub Subhani
murid of Abu Sayid Mubarak
murid of Hasan Qureshi
murid of Abu Farah

75. [K63] [The list of *Sufi* divines continues in the first part of this page]

1. Khwaja Ghaus Bahaud-din
2. Turkoman Biyabani Dehlavi
3. Khwaja Sufi Hamidud-din Nagori

Four *pirs* (masters of a higher spiritual order) who expounded the idea of truth *(haqiqat)*.

1. Hazrat Adam Shafi-ullah
2. Hazrat Ibrahim Khalil-ullah
3. Hazrat Musa Kalim-ullah

4. Hazrat Prophet Mohammed Mustapha.[*sic*]

[The lower portion of this page is not complete and hence not decipherable]

76. [K62] 4 *pirs* of the *ma'rifat*

1. Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq
2. Hazrat Umar Farooq
3. Hazrat Usman Gani
4. Hazrat Ali

Who are the four masters of the Islamic law (*shari'a)*?

1. Hazrat Imam Azam Abu Hanifah
2. Hazrat Imam Shafi'i
3. Hazrat Imam Hanbal
4. Hazrat Imam Malik

Genealogy of Prophet Mohammed
ben Abdullah
ben Hashim

77. [K61] Who are the four masters of the *Sufi* path (*tariqa*?)

1. Hazrat Imam Hasan
2. Hazrat Imam Hussain
3. Hazrat Khwaja Kumail bin Zaid
4. Hazrat Khwaja Hasan Basri

Some have said that these hidden teachers of the *tariqat* are the masters:

1. Hazrat Khwaja Hasan Basri
2. Hazrat Khwaja Uways Qarani
3. Hazrat Khwaja Kumayl bin Zayd
4. Hazrat Abdullah Makki

78-81. [K60-57] [These pages have some *modi* script]

82. [K56] [This page is in Arabic]

Invocation of God's blessings. May they be great. *Allah* is great.

83. [K55] [This page should come after page 84 and continues the internal numbering]

17. Khwaja Ibrahim Adham Balkhi
18. Khwaja Chisht
19. Khwaja Abdal Chisht

20. Khwaja Usman
21. Khwaja Mu'inud-din Chishti
22. Khwaja Banda Sarfraz

84. [K54] [List of the names of Muslim divines]

In the name of *Allah* the most beneficent and merciful.

1. Khwaja Uways Qarani
2. Khwaja Kumail bin-Zaid
3. Khwaja Hasan Basri
4. Khwaja Habib Ajami
5. Khwaja Bayazid Bistami
6. Khwaja Ma'ruf Karkhi
7. Khwaja Hasan Sari Saqati
8. Khwaja Junayd Baghdadi
9. Khwaja Abu Ishaq Gazruni
10. Khwaja Abu Farah Tartawsi
11. Khwaja Najibu'din Firdawsi
12. Khwaja Shiabuddin Suhrawardhi
13. Khwaja Mu'inuddin Farmadi
14. Khwaja Ghaus Baha'ud-din
15. Khwaja Al-Wahid bin Zaid Asa
16. Khwaja Ayyaz

85. [K53] [Illegible scribble in *modi* script with some numbers]

86. [K52] [Begins to give the history of early Islam]

In the name of *Allah* the most beneficent and merciful.

Hazrat Mohammed Mustafa was followed by the following lineage:

Hazrat Abu Bakr, Hazrat Umar, Hazrat Usman, Ali, Fatima, Hazrat Imam Hasan, Hazrat Imam Husain, Hazrat Musa Kazim

[Further printing too faint to read]

87. [K51] Mantra *Aja Jana* repeated over and over.

Arabic quotation from the *hadith*, 'I am *nur* (light of *Allah*) and everything radiates from my divine light.'

88. [K50] [Hierarchy of saints - the page has poor calligraphy which is hard to decipher]

1. *Qutb al-aqtab* the Supreme Qutb. Under him are 12 *qutbs* who are spread over the seven seas. If one dies another takes his place. They are like *wazirs* (ministers) with a staff under them.
2. Under the *qutb* is one *Ghaus*.
3. Lower than the *ghaus* are 2 *Imams*.
4. Under them are 375 *abdals* spread over seven lands, who are the help of the helpless, and who live in forests and mountains. Forty of these abdals are called *abrar* [(not a separate category)].

89. [K49] [not properly decipherable]

5. Under them are 4 *autads*, who live in the four corners of the world. There is peace in the world due to these 4 *autads*.
6. 4 Good men whose status is lower than *autads*.
7. 300 persons who are constantly doing *parayana* (continuous reading) of the *Qur'an* day and night.

90. [K48] [This is a continuation of the hierarchy of saints on page K49]

8. *70 najib* [pl. *nujaba*] who take on the suffering of others and give solace to them.
9. *7 akhyar*, who always serve the religion of God (*din haqq*).
10. 4,000 individuals who are living on this earth doing good pure works.
11. *Afrad* whose number is beyond count, who are engaged day and night remembering God and in prayer (*namaz*).

91. [K47] [A Persian verse translated into Urdu]
How many ascetics really understand God?
He who regards himself as equal to those who have attained the religious heights, i.e. saints, and regards them as just ordinary people has strayed from the path. He does not understand the sayings and conduct of the spiritual authorities. If he rebukes them it will be disgraceful. Remember that the *abdals* [category of saints] are

counted among the *awliya Allah* [friends of God]. They have derived special powers and capacities from God, appointed for special duties.

92. [K46] [Top portion of this page is not clear.]
The external appearance is unreliable. What you see today is transient. Anybody can have doubts about it. *Abdals* are of different kinds and they are invested with authority according to their capacity. The population of the earth is divided into 7 kingdoms (*aqlims*). Therefore the number of *abdals* is also 7. Every *abdal* is governor or administrator of that direction and from time to time also looks after internal administration. Administration of this world is also controlled by an external force. *Allah* has also divided the internal kingdom. The earthly kingdom is entrusted to Emperors. Spiritual arrangements are entrusted to holy men, *abdals,* etc. Sometimes these people look after external administration for the management of the inner world is the same as the external material world.

93. [K45] Briefly speaking there are 7 spiritual kingdoms (*aqlims*) and 7 *abdals* who are entrusted with its administration. The *abdal* of the first kingdom is Ibrahim Khalilullah. The second is Mussah, the third is Harun, the fourth is Idris and the fifth is Yussuf. All of them have to walk in the footsteps of *Allah*.

94. [K44] [This page is in continuation of page 93; parts are not clear or intelligible.]
The seventh Divine is Adam who walks in the footsteps of God. By this is meant that he observes the duties prescribed by *Allah* for Paigambar (messenger of God). Accordingly the Divines of the first order is the way of Hazrat Paigambar Ibrahim. They have been given the status of Paigambar, therefore saints of this category are designated as *abdals*.

95. [K43] He is called a *naqib* who has knowledge of temporal affairs. As there are 12 constellations or planets (*buruz*) in the sky so there are 12 saints (*naqib* pl. *nuqaba*). Every *naqib* has the characteristics of his ruling planet and knows the effects of the planets. Every *naqib* has been given the knowledge of *shar'iat* (Muslim law), *istikhraj* (deductive logic), and *fikrnaqush* and *hisabnaqush* (detailed knowledge of the zodiac), and is aware of their deficiencies and the knowledge of how to remove the effects of those deficiencies.

96. [K42] If you are born on this earth, you can satisfy your quest for spiritual knowledge. Maulana Rumi says: A man should honour and have respect for great spiritual people who should be considered to be the best of creatures, and that honouring them should be the duty of each individual. Such behaviour is favoured by *Allah*. This is necessary in order to attain God. He who insults them will not get any boon or blessing from God.

97. [K41] That person who is devoid of the sense of taste cannot distinguish between sweet water and sour water. If the power of taste is damaged then one cannot distinguish them. Similarly only that person who has the taste or experience of the power of God, he alone can realize God. Those who have not had divine insight can never have self-realization. Only a goldsmith can distinguish gold from other metals. Similarly, the beauty of a flower can be known by a *bul bul* (Urdu poets refer to the black minar bird).

98. [K40] [Verse at the top in poetry]
'A discriminating gourmet alone appreciates the taste of fine food'.

Maulana Rumi says, only a person who has tasted *misry* (sugar) or those whose tongue has the power to taste sweetness, will know the quality of sweetness. Those who have not tasted or who have lost their power of taste, will not know. To him there will be no difference between wax and honey! In the same way Maulana Rumi means that those who do not have a taste for *'irfan* or spiritual knowledge, how would they know the eminence of the *awliya*, appreciate their hierarchy, or recognize those born as Paigambars, or Great Divines?. To him these people will appear just like himself, but in fact there is as much distinction between earth and sky as between himself and the saints and prophets.

99. [K39] In order to reach a higher stage of spirituality [God-realization], it is necessary to practice severe renunciation and celibacy. That means he should be awake at day and night, stay away from women, abjure from delicious food and reside in jungles and mountains. The common people of our times regard this as a test of perfection because in religious matters, staunch discipline and strict control over desires is considered to be the *dharma*.

100. [K38] Quotation from the *Qur'an* saying that austerity is accepted by Islam.

Do not be attached to your life - *Allah* will also tie you down because austerity is accepted by Islam. A man in whom the above qualities manifest in his sayings and conduct, must be in conformity with the Islamic law (*Shariat*) *hadith* and the great Divines. Then only he reaches the higher stages.

[The lower half portion is not clearly decipherable.]

101. [K37] [This page gives a line of succession of divines.]

Your test is that you observe the highest degree of renunciation (in the mind). Shaikh Ahmad of Turkestan, who is the greatest *Pir* of Turkestan was the
murid of Khwaja Khalifa Yusuf Hamdani, who was
murid of Khwaja Abu Ali Pharmadi who was
murid of Abul Qasim Gurgani who was
murid of Usman Maghrabi who was
murid of Shaikh ʻAli Katib who was
murid of Shaikh ʻAli Rudbarani who was
murid of Khwaja Junayd Baghdadi

102. [K36] Khwaja Junayd Baghdadi is called *alawi* because he is a follower of Ali (Shiya). Shaikh Bin, Ibrahim Bin, Mahommed Ilyas Bin, Iftikhar Bin, Usman Bin, Musa Bin, Haroon Bin, Ishaq Bin, Yasin Bin, Abdul Rahman Bin, Ismail Abu Mahommed Bin, Abdul Jalin Bin, Abdul Fattah Bin, Amir Abu Mohammed, Haif Ba Mustara.

103. [K35] Maulana Rumi says that the observance of severe austerity, is a prerequisite for attaining higher levels of spirituality. You should be awake day and night, remain away from women, avoid rich food, reside in the jungles and mountains. Ordinary people of our times regard this as the highest form of austerity because of the severity of the conditions imposed in religious matters, and the control over desires. God's messenger, Mohammed - Peace be upon him, is also of the same view.

104. [K34] [The holy *hadith* says]

Do not be attached to your life because God will also tie you down. This means that renunciation is acceptable to Islam. Briefly speaking, the person in which the aforesaid virtues manifest and whose word, thought and deed are in conformity, will be respected and the sayings of Islamic saints will be counted as among the great, and because of such people sin can be expiated. A man embodying these qualities is fit to be a *murshid* and it is fortunate to be a disciple of such a one.

105. [K33] [The page starts with a quotation from Maulana Rumi's poetry in Persian.]

The poet Shiraz says,'That *Sufi* who is not pure *(safi)* will earn the wrath of God.'

These people are Satans in human form therefore do not praise the evil-minded. Do not help them. Maulana Shiraz says, the speech of some is not pure. Some *faqirs* are so wicked that we feel like taking away their *kafni* and consigning them to the fire. O mind, Beware! Be Awake! This dangerous wall of the world (separating you from God) is fleeting, and so to engross yourself in it, is truly madness. The divine beings who have come adorned with a wealth of virtues have come here to acquire spiritual goods for the other world. Do not be a broker in this world, otherwise you will not gain the wealth of the other world.

106. [K32] He who loses the genuine eye ointment and buys false pearls and synthetic goods, which are without any value in the world, such people will only be humiliated and will have to repent ultimately. O people! Beware of such false *pirs* and *faqirs*. Outwardly they are men in appearance - but in their hearts they are satanic. These people regard the dance and song of the prostitute etc., as the best of *Sufi* (Chishti) mode of worship. And some of them boast about being *Sayyads* or *Pirzadas* or *Shaykhs*. Truly speaking they have lost the favour of God. [...not clear after this]

107. [K31] It is very necessary to protect yourself from those who invite you in the path leading to satan, and who indulge in evil activities. A description has been given in the biographies of the *Sufi* saints (*awliya*). 'He who has not seen the pathway to *Allah* remains blind in the world - then he wanders like a blind man among people. He is not able to see God. Please show your beatific form of yours. I am a very meek slave of yours.'

108. [K30] One who has not discovered the gate or way to God remains blind in the world, even though he stays amongst the people because he is not able to see God.

Prayer:

Kudha! [God] Let me see your beatific form - I am a meek helpless slave of yours - not remembering the path which leads to you. I am wandering. O friend! this is the meaning of that saying. He who has been sinning in this world, like a blind man straying from the path, he is not discovering the gateway to God so he wanders from door to door.

109. [K29] When in the *nimbar* (niche) of your heart, the Beloved is enthroned, what is the need for the *pesh-iman* (priest)? If we can achieve *ivadat* (our end) by prayer to

God *(Allah*), what is the necessity to go to the *masjid* to listen to the *Kutba*. If all the time we are engrossed in devotion to God, why should we do *namaz* five times a day, in the morning, noon etc.? If we are all in love with the Beloved, we will go and reside in the mandir - why should we go to and visit the *ka'ba* in Mecca?

110. [K28] What is *namaz*? Why fast (*roza*) [in the month of Ramadan]? At present I am engaged in heresy if I ask what is *qalam*? When the Beloved is enthroned in the heart how can we see the *pesh-imams*? If we are ever engrossed in prayer, meditation on *Allah*, or performing service - what need is there to go to the *masjid*, the *dargah* (shrine) or listen to the *Qutba*? During the eight watches of the day (24 hrs) we are engaged in the the remembrance of the Beloved. What is the need for us to perform the five times a day *namaz - subah, zuhr, asr, magrib* and *isha*?

Quotation from a *ghazal*.

We are in the embrace of the love of the Beloved. We shall go and reside in the *mandir* and stay there. We will make collections and think of the non-believers. We have no interest in visiting the *ka'ba* [in Mecca]. The face of the Beloved is engraved on my heart. Why should we do prostrations (*sajda*) and *salaam*? Why *namaz*, why fast? According to the *Shari'at* I should be engaged in all these practices. Then what is all this *qalam* [I am non-conformist].

111. [K27] [The hierarchy of saints is given]

The *Qutb-al-aqtab* is the highest of all the *qutbs*. Under him are 12 *qutbs* who are like the Prime Minister and Administrators. If one dies, another immediately occupies that position. Lesser than *qutbs* are the *Ghaus* or Helpers of the age. There are 2 *Imams* who are lesser status than the *Ghaus*. There are 7 *abdals* who look after the oppressed ones.

112. [K26] There are 357 lower *abdals* who are subordinate to the 7 *Abdals* and they live in the jungle and mountains. 40 among these *abdals* are known as *abrar*. There are 4 *autad*, one in each of the four directions, N,S E & W. They care for the functioning of the world and settling the population. In the fifth category there are 4 men who are lower in order to the *autad*. In the seventh category there are 300 called *Nuqaba* who are ever repeating '*Allah*' at all times. There are 4 pirs and 14......?

113. [K25] In the eighth category there are 70 *najibs* who take upon themselves the sufferings and problems of others to relieve their burden. In the ninth category there are 7 *akhyars* who always help to support the religion of God *din-haqq* [*Islam*]. In the 10th category there are 4000 *mikwana* living all over the earth, who are constantly engaged in good deeds. In the 11th category there are a great number of people (other than the 4000) called *Ifad* who are highly spiritual and are ever engrossed in devotion, prayer and singing the names of God.

114. [K24] Five questions have been raised in the beginning of this page. Where is *mushaf,* the sacred writing of the Qur'an Sharif, in the body of man? Where is faith (*mu'min*)? Who is a Musalman? Who is a non-believer (*kafir*)? Who is a traveller?

The answers are: The head is *'mushaf'* - scrolls are in the head, which contain wisdom, knowledge ('*aql).* The heart is '*mu'min*' the seat of full faith. The tongue is '*musalman*'. The 'ego' or desires are '*kafir*'. The spirit '*ruh*' is the '*musafir*' or traveller.

Question: Why is one *kalima* not enough for true faith? Why are we told that five are necessary? There are 5 *Sufi kalimas*, each with a specific purpose of purification:

1. *Kalima tayyiba* for purification of the heart.
2. *Kalima shahada* for purification of the speech [*la Ilaha illa 'llah*]. [I bear witness that there is no God but *Allah* and I bear witness that Mohammad is the Apostle of God].

3. *Kalima tamjeed* for purification of the chest [*Allah* is One].
4. *Kalima tauhid* for internal purification.
5. *Kalima* [word missing] for purification and strengthening of faith (*iman)*.

115. [K23] May *Allah* shower peace on the spirit of Hazrat Paigambar who realized the Light of *Allah*. He is the Knower who has realized the Divine Principle within. O Disciple! Listen! The rewards are of six types. Know and remember completely how the mind works. May the Light Supreme ever grow in radiance. In the *Qur'an Sharif* it has been stated that the earth was created in six days.

1. From God (zat) was created light (*nur*).
2. From light was created the innermost heart where divine revelation is experienced (*sirr*).
3. From the inner heart, spirit (*ruh*) was created.
4. From spirit, the heart (*dil*) was created
5. From the heart are the desires (*nafs*).
6. Ego-self or lower nature (nafs)

In nature is contained light. O Disciple! First of all establish control over your desires. See within the heart the Divine Principle.

116. [K22] [*the numbering does not quite accord with the previous page - but the meaning is there]* The third stage is spirit (*ruh*); the fourth stage is innermost heart (sirr); the fifth is divine light (*nur)*; and the sixth stage is *zat,* divine nature. Therefore we should first be aware of the desires (*nafs)* and then proceed to the heart. After seeing the light of the spirit enlightening the heart, see *ruh* or spirit in it and then reach the head. From this stage we reach the *nur* and in *nur* there are all the signs of *zat* - divine nature. God is just like the quality of sweetness in sugar, the fragrance in flowers, the curds in milk, the butter in curds, and the ghee in butter (clarified). Step by step you should proceed with the Grace of God and you

will reach your desired desination.
[An Arabic quotation is given:]
May God shower the peace and spirit of Paigambar. One who has recognized the Light of *Allah* is the true Knower.

117. [K21] These *chahal tan* - 40 men [*Sufi divines*] have experienced God directly and are God-realized.[1]

1. Hazrat Habib-al-Haqq[2]
2. Hazrat Badi-al-Haqq*
3. Hazrat Lakht-al-Haqq
4. Hazrat Karim-al-Haqq*
5. Hazrat Mohib-al-Haqq
6. Hazrat Rahim-al-Haqq*
7. Hazrat Jamil-al-Haqq*
8. Hazrat Shafi-al-Haqq
9. Hazrat Wakil-al-Haqq
10. Hazrat Hafiz-al-Haqq*
11. Hazrat Wufi-al-Haqq
12. Shaikh Fatir-al-Haqq
13. Hazrat Faiq-al-Haqq
14. Hazrat Sajid-al-Haqq
15. Hazrat Majid-al-Haqq
16. Hazrat Wajid-al-Haqq*
17. Hazrat Amjad-al-Haqq
18. Hazrat Wasil-al-Haqq

118. [K20] 19. Hazrat Warith -al-Haqq*
20. Hazrat Malik-al-Haqq*
21. Hazrat Fatih-al-Haqq
22. Hazrat Zamin-al-Haqq
23. Hazrat Wahid-al-Haqq*
24. Hazrat Basit-al-Haqq*
25. Hazrat Wasi-al-Haqq
26. Hazrat Shakur-al-Haqq*
27. Hazrat Rahman-al-Haqq*
28. Hazrat Ghafur-al-Haqq*
29. Hazrat Ghayat-al-Haqq
30. Hazrat Jamid-al-Haqq

31. Hazrat Mohammed Saghir
32. Hazrat Sultan
33. Hazrat Latif*
34. Hazrat Khabir*
35. Hazrat Qabur
36. Hazrat Khalid
37. Hazrat Tahir
38. Hazrat Sabur
39. Hazrat Malik
40. Hazrat Mukarram

119. [K19] We all ought to perform prayers (*namaz)* but the difference is that some do it whole-heartedly and others only for appearance. God alone knows his own ways. We have heard from many astrologers and soothsayers, and taken notice of other people but the real secret of *Khuda* [God] is not known to anyone. Someone pretends to become a *pir*, showing his skills, attracting and influencing people in order to fill his coffers and amass wealth. God alone knows his ways. He pretends to be a puritan master (*murshid*). If you are a true character you will beware of such pretenders. They pretend to be orthodox, to fast (*roza*) and take the guise of holy persons. Shafi says that enemies of Islam may have been rewarded and many may appear to remain unpunished by following these false practices. But beware of such people for *Allah* knows his ways!

120. [K18] When the pen is in the hands of wicked persons, why should not Mansur [al-Hallaj] be put on the gallows. *Pujaris* who perform worship and eat forbidden food [they are not true Brahmans]. God only knows his own ways. There are thousands of *mullahs* (teachers), thousands of *alims* (scholars), hundreds of thousands of *mufti* (jurists), millions of *qadis* (judges). Most of these people have started taking bribes. *Allah* only knows his ways. When the pen is in the hands of the wicked, why should Mansur not be hanged?

There have been times when man raised himself to such a level that even the angels prostrated before him, so why does man lower himself now? O Shahbaz (the royal falcon), your place is high in the sky. Man is like the falcon. When he possesses good qualities he is like Shahbaz, and can fly spiritually high.

121. [K17] & **122.** [K16] [The names of forty *Sufi* divines. This is a repeat of pages **117** [K21] - **118** [K20]].
The horses of reasoning run amok and enter into controversies. If a *pujari* (Hindu priest) meets another *pujari*, if a *wahabi* (member of a puritan sect of Muslims) meets another *wahabi* - their sense runs amok.

123. [K15] [Some illegible *modi* script]

124. [K14] In the presence of your father (*Allah)*, all the angels stand with their heads bowed in reverence before him. Why do you aspire to be the light? You are like the mythological eagle Shahbaz who always flies high. Your throne is in heaven. When the pen is in the hands of a wicked person, why should Mansur not be put on the gallows?

125. [K13] In the heart of man are four gems.

1. *Ilm* - Knowledge. The place of *ilm* is in the chest.
2. *Aql* - Intelligence, reason is in the head.
3. *Sabr* - Patience, contentment is in the stomach.
4. *Iman* - Faith in God is in the heart.

The enemy of knowledge (*ilm)* is pride.
The enemy of reason (*aql*) is anger.
The enemy of patience (*sabr)* is greed.
The enemy of faith in God (*iman*) is untruth.

126. [K12] [Four elements are given, with their colours, associated individuals and angels]
zamin - earth is associated with the colour yellow and with the Musulmani angel Gabriel.
Water is associated with Michael and Amir Mohammed.
shakti (power) or Parvati. White is its colour.
Isra'fil, the angel which blows the trumpet at the time of the destruction of the world. Green is its colour.

Mehdi Alehuslam - after the names of holy men are repeated. My peace be upon them. *Isra'fil* that is fire - *atish* is associated with *malik al-maut* the angel of death. Red is its colour, and the colour of anger is also red.

127. [K11] Vishnu is equal to the *Bismillah ar-Rahim, Allah* the Merciful the Pardoner. Ali is equal to Brahma. Mahadev is equal to Mohammed and to *Malik al-maut*, the angel of death.

128. [K10] [This page lists some of the Hindu *avatars* with interpolations]
Maccha, Kaccha, Varaha, Narasiun [Hindi corruption of Narasimha], Vaman, Parasuram, Ram, Krishna, Buddha, Shishupal Karidanta [Vakradanta], Kalanki, Konas [Kamsa]
Sakhi - a friend
Shakki [Shakti] - power
Nekabakht - the fortunate; *Badbakht* - unfortunate

129. [K9] [This section appears to be a mixture of names of *avatars*, kings and mythological or epic figures]
Shankasur, Kaccha, Varaha, Narasimha, Giridhara, Murdhanya, Harkib [Rishabha], Vaman, Bali - Koopnalan [Kunal], Parasuram [Sarsarkhum], Rajaram, Ravana, Kumbakarna, Krishna, Shishupal [brother-in-law of Kamsa], Buddha, Surya, Kalanki that is Ibrahim [Abraham] that is Mohammed from the Qur'an.

130-133. [K8-5] [These pages appear to contain an invocation or mantra. It is mostly indecipherable]

134. [K4] [Page written in Arabic. It is a prayer to *Allah* in praise of Ali]
O Lighthouse of wisdom! the Helper [of the helpless]!
O Purifier of the Self!, O Lord of the two worlds!
O Merciful *Allah*! Head of the Believers! [Hazrat Mohammed]
Abu Talib's son is the Lion of *Allah*! Powerful Ali!
Hazrat Imam Hasan! Hazrat Imam Husain!
The first Mehdi and the last Mehdi [the saviour yet to come]

There is no other God but *Allah* and Mohammed is his messenger.

135. [K3] [Hindu mantra or spell]
Brahma the Creator created the three worlds, the earth, the heaven and the nether lower regions. Vishnu is the source of the ten incarnations [*dasavatars*]. The Veda enables you to cross the ocean of samsara, and after you cross there is no cause for misery or suffering. Chanting of the scriptures at home is helpful and worship of the *murtis* (idols). The sun is one with Brahma and is the mine of the *gunas*. On the day of the dark phase of the moon, recitation of *shanti path* for the pacification of Jupiter, Saturn and Mars [is performed]. *Chhoo Mantar*! - Go away!

136. [K2] [This page is in *modi* script, in praise of Sai Baba.]

137. [K1] [A part of a page written in Arabic, with parts unclear and missing]
In the name of *Allah*, the most beneficent and merciful. At my door is *Allah* - in front of me is Ali's son Hasan, behind me is Fatima and Husain. My saviours are Hasan and Husain, the two handsome youths. I praise them. Daud, Sulyman, and Ali are my protectors. There is no other God but *Allah* and Hazrat Mohammed is his messenger.

NOTES

1. A * is placed next to the 15 names which accord with one in the traditional list of '99 Beautiful Names of Allah' given by Carl Ernst in *Sufism*, pp. 82-84.
2. Hazrat is an Arabic word used in Urdu and Persian as an honorific for a Muslim holy man.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Some Observations on the Saibaba Ms

Through close examination of the English translation of the *Saibaba MS*, it is now possible to state authoritatively that Sai Baba must have had a thorough training in the Islamic esoteric tradition in his early years before becoming a *Sufi* Master in later life - an assertion which could not have been made before now. No other body of writing has preserved or recorded in such detail this crucial *Sufi* facet of Sai Baba's knowledge and teaching - a facet which has, hitherto, been almost entirely overlooked or unwittingly suppressed. The information given in the *Saibaba MS* is neither complete nor is it particularly unique, and can in fact be found in any comprehensive history text on Islam or Sufism. But its importance for our purpose lies in the fact that it confirms Sai Baba's overall familiarity with Islam and *Sufi* precepts in particular, and this new revelation is the notebook's primary strength and most valuable contribution to understanding Sai Baba first as a *faqir* and subsequently as a *Murshid* in his own right. Thus, the designation of Sai Baba as a 'Muslim *faqir*' was no mere courtesy title based on his outward appearance alone, but was based on his wide knowledge of the tenets of Islam. While there is no conclusive evidence to suggest that Sai Baba belonged to any particular branch of Islam from the information recorded in the *Saibaba MS*, covering as it does the spectrum of traditional Islamic *Shar'iat, Shi'i, Isma'ili* and *Sufi* doctrines, there is proportionately more *Sufi* material on the Chishtiyya Order than on any other Order. In fact, page 9 [K129] of the *Saibaba MS*, which is the first page written in Urdu, names two of the most famous Chishti *Khwajas*, Mu'inuddin Chishti and Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki. However, neither Sai Baba's biographers nor the

Saibaba MS seriously suggest that he was formally associated with the Chishti Order or with any special sect. Indeed it is clear that he was a mystic who synthesized ideas both within and beyond Islamic parameters. The contents of the *Saibaba MS* reveal that Sai Baba was fully conversant with the *Qur'an*, the *Hadith* and the *tasawwuf* - the mystic branch of *Islam - Sufism*. This is in contradistinction to the prevailing impression left by his biographers that, while Sai Baba might have been Muslim in appearance, his message was essentially Hindu. It is often said that Sai Baba never gave discourses, but the *Saibaba MS* reveals that he gave quite extensive spiritual talks to Abdul, for example on the role of intellect being like a *wazir* or Prime Minister, the different types of behaviour (pp.27-40 [K111-K98]) and the warning to beware false *pirs* (pp.105-107 [K33-K31]).

The *Saibaba MS* displays Sai Baba's familiarity with Islamic history which ranges over the family of the Prophet Mohammad; the Companions of the Prophet; the early development of Islam, the *Khalifas* or line of succession of early Islamic Dynasties; early *Shi'ism* and the later esoteric teachings of the *Isma'ilis* in India. Sufism in India is also represented with lists of its organisation into various Orders with their *silsilas* or chain of succession. A list of forty *names* is given twice in the *MS*, and each name on the list includes the title *Hazrat*, an Islamic courtesy title meaning 'Revered Master', and each name has '*al-Haqq*' (Truth or God) appended to it - for example Hazrat [Name] al-Haqq. In the *Qur'an* there are many names and epithets found to describe Allah, embodying his divine qualities, and ninety-nine of these have traditionally been chosen as the 'Ninety-nine most beautiful names' of God. There are many more than this traditional number however, in the *Qur'an*. Of the forty listed in the *Saibaba MS*, it transpires that fifteen names positively correlate with some of the ninety-nine traditional names.[1] There are possibly more as Abdul's spelling may not have been good, and only one letter is different in a number of them, or letters or vowels may have got lost in translation or in the xeroxing process. We can surmise that on one occasion Abdul opened the *Qur'an* to a page where some names of *Allah* were mentioned, such as in *sura* 20 - '*Allah*, there is no God but He. To Him belong the most beautiful names'[2] Sai Baba must then have spoken about them, and listed some which Abdul wrote down. The remaining names also list qualities which are sometimes used as names for God, such as *Habib* (Dear Revered One) or *Zamin* (Saviour or Protector). The list is headed by the words *'chahl tan'* which means forty men, which is confusing if they are names of God. No explanation is offered for the number forty except perhaps that in the *Saibaba MS*, the *abdal* who are a category of saints in the hierarchy, are frequently mentioned, and their number is also forty. On page 111 [K27] of the *Saibaba MS,* when speaking about the *abdals*, this enigmatic comment is found: 'Forty among these *abdals* are known as *abrar* who are *al-Haqq.*'

In researching the contents of the notebook, I made copious notes on all the eminent Islamic figures and the dynastic succession and histories mentioned therein, until I realized that I would have to write a history of Islam spanning 1300 years, with biographies of all its significant figures to cover all the information evoked by the lists - which would be a book in itself! It was an impossible task and the information is readily available in encyclopedias and Islamic histories. I have decided therefore, that the reader should review the lists as they stand in the translation, and have restricted my comments on the text only to those occasions when it will lead to a clearer understanding of Sai Baba himself. Although a page by page analysis of the *Saibaba MS* would seem to be a logical and efficient way to proceed, it would at the same time be very tedious and repetitious as the subject matter is not always sequential. In the interests of succinct explanation and brevity, certain topics only will be isolated and discussed.

How and where Sai Baba could have acquired such an overall understanding and depth of Islamic knowledge is a question discussed elsewhere in this book. It is now becoming evident that for many decades he was a mentor to wandering *faqirs* who, regarding him as their *pir*, came regularly to visit him in Shirdi.

But for his new Hindu audience arriving towards the end of his life, the saint accommodated his teachings to suit their understanding. However, the universal message remained the same - that God-realization should be man's true goal in life, irrespective of whether it is called *brahmajnana* or *ma'rifat*, and this is also the thrust of the discourses found in the *MS.* To the Hindu majority of visitors and devotees he disclosed his message through demonstration and parable, while the *faqir* Abdul was taught through the practice and precept of Islam and Sufism. As indicated earlier, the writings of a few Hindu devotees and Sai Baba's brahmin biographers, Dabholkar, Gunaji and Narasimhaswami, have unwittingly tended to obscure Sai Baba's Islamic roots, largely through their own ignorance of Sufism, thereby imparting a Hindu gloss to his life and sayings. In fact, out of his span of eighty years, Hindu devotees came to know him only during his final ten years or less, but it was their interpretation of him which has come to dominate our view of him today. The information found within the *Saibaba MS* enables us to redress the balance and restore, in part, the sage's *Sufi*-Muslim identity.

The Qur'an

Sai Baba would occasionally call Abdul to open the *Qur'an* and read a few verses chosen at random, on which he would then expound.[3] The large copy of the *Qur'an*, which they used and read from, is still extant, preserved by Abdul's family in Shirdi, and is on show in the rooms close to the *chavadi* which used to be occupied by Abdul. Sai Baba's explanation of these verses provided the impulse which prompted Abdul to keep a notebook. It is likely that only a very small percentage of the information that Sai Baba actually taught ever got recorded on paper by Abdul. Abdul's intent, judging from the informal manner of notation, was merely to preserve for his own use some of the mystic words of his teacher which he regarded as sacred. Unfortunately, he even failed to record the specific chapters or *suras* under discussion at the time. In some cases, however, it is possible to detect which verse from the *Qur'an* might have sparked a particular comment and explanation. In one place the verse is written out although the reference is omitted, while in others the verses are merely paraphrased. Those familiar with the *Qur'an* can probably guess which verse is referred to, or in the case of the 'ninety-nine beautiful names of Allah' referred to earlier, there are a number of choices. Abdul also records these *Qur'anic* quotations in Arabic, including some from the *Hadith* which were occasionally given by Sai Baba to emphasize a point, but again the specific references are not given. Abdul plainly had no concept that his brief notes would one day be important in our understanding of Sai Baba.

Many pages in the *Saibaba MS* start in the same way as each *sura* of the *Qur'an*, with the '*Bismi'lla ar-Rahman ar-Rahim*' meaning 'In the Name of *Allah*, the most Beneficent and Merciful'. On page 137 [K1] is a special blessing from *Allah* to 'Ali and the family of 'Ali Rasul (Mohammad). This is an orthodox Muslim opening in the Alawid tradition.[4] Mentioned specifically are: 'Ali, who is the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet; Fatima, who is both the daughter of Mohammad and the wife of 'Ali; and their two sons, Hasan and Husain. The *Sunnis, Shi'is* and *Sufis* all revere 'Ali, the *Sunnis* as the fourth *Khalifa*, the *Shi'is* as their first *Imam* who is the infallible guide and fountain of wisdom, and the *Sufis* as the first *Sufi*, all of whom trace their chain of transmission of esoteric knowledge back to him.[5] Similarly while the *Sunni* revere Hasan and Husain as *Khalifas*, the *Shi'is* revere them as *Imams*. The names of 'Ali ibn Abu Talib, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, and his family are mentioned on a number of pages throughout the *Saibaba MS*. 'Ali is very much revered and a short devotional prayer to *Allah* composed by 'Ali himself is also quoted on page 11 [K127] (translated from the Arabic). 'Ali wrote many *Du'a* or Supplications to *Allah*, which are written in the same devotional style.[6]

> You are the listener to our prayers.
> You are the Deity of Worlds.
> We worship You and seek Your help.
> With Your blessings, O greatest of Mercifuls!

Summary of Sai Baba's teachings on the way to reach God from the Saibaba MS.

In examining the *Saibaba MS*, we find randomly interspersed among details of Islamic history and lists of significant *Sufi silsilas,* some sacred words, mystic teachings and short discourses of Sai Baba taught to Abdul. The overall message found therein is of a purely spiritual nature. Very little of a worldly nature emerged from his lips - and there is a constant urging, cajoling, and insistence that the only thing in this world worth striving for is divine insight leading to God-realization. This alone, he insisted, will dispel the veils of ignorance. *Ma'rifat* or the mystical realization of God is the very goal of life, but, as those who have never tasted sugar cannot comprehend sweetness except by tasting it, discoursed Sai Baba, so God cannot be understood without experiencing Him. The following is a summary of Sai Baba's gems of spiritual teaching from the pages of the *Saibaba MS:*

One's love of God must be of a spiritual nature - not material. To attain a vision or experience of God is man's only reason for being. Taking birth is for this sole purpose! But this spiritual reality cannot be attained through the intellect - as thinking is an inadequate tool to understand God. What we should be aiming for is divine insight into God's nature and plan - thereby we will know his true form. It is impossible to truly picture God in any material sense - so the *Qur'an* forbids it as the effort may distract one. In order to realize God you must renounce the worldly pleasures and objects which also involves disciplining the mind, but the most important thing is to open the heart in love of God. Sai Baba avers that if you earnestly practice the injunctions outlined in the *Sufi tariqat*, then mystic knowledge of God will automatically come to you.

Until such a time when you experience a spiritual vision of God, you will just see the world as material. But the external world is really unreal - the real world lies on a subtle level - made up of eternal erergy called *prana.* Similarly the physical body as well as the material world are impermanent - they will die - only the subtle energy which forms the soul survives. While explaining a particular *sura* in the *Qur'an* to Abdul, Sai Baba spoke of the mystical relationship of body, mind and soul known as *ruh,* stressing the importance of morality and good behaviour in forming character. He decried low behaviour springing from both base instincts and strong emotions, such as anger, violence and greed, as being the type of behaviour one expects from animals. Man must practise morality and rise to the realization of his divine status. Spiritual reality is difficult to comprehend and orthodox Islam does not permit further spiritual enquiry by its followers. However, mysticism goes beyond to penetrate the veil, and if individuals intent on seeing God follow the mystic path and practise the precepts laid down, they will realize God. Loving God exclusively is the key - not thinking or intellectualizing.

The purpose for the creation of the world is so that man can love God. God creates for us a physical body with hands and feet with which to operate in the world and render service, and with which to repay our karmic debt. The world should be a better place for our being there. Everyone has to reach the realization that God permeates the world , and thus all one's actions should be dedicated to God as the omniscient power. God blesses, not only mankind but also the unseen spirits (*jinns*) who also crave the chance to reach him.

God has also given us a brain and mind which are both merely instruments. The senses receive information and the brain can store it in memory. But these are merely mechanical tools which transmit information, but they do not have the intelligence to analyse or discriminate. That is the function of the non-material *buddhi* - to make decisions for the individual based on this discriminating faculty. Sai Baba likens *buddhi* to a Prime Minister of a country, who has to make vital political decisions for the welfare of the state and its citizens. Greed, envy, hatred, lust, anger and jealousy are the six enemies that may invade the moral territory - so *buddhi* has to be alert to ward them off. Desires and emotions should be controlled so that the individual can grow spiritually.

For spiritual progress one should avoid people performing wrong actions and those who entertain jealousy and wrong motivations. People who practicise evil try to lure spiritual people away from the pure path, but low people such as those who live by theft from others, should be avoided at all cost. To even reach the first rung on the ladder to God-realization, one must first be born a human being, who can then follow ethical codes of behaviour in his life. Although the human body shares many similarities with animals on the physical plane, man has been endowed with a higher consciousness and discrimination in his behaviour. While animal qualities of greed, uncontrolled lust and anger, can be fostered by human beings, man also has the ability to overcome them, along with aggressive behaviour and satanic tendencies. Every man possesses an inner Controller - the Conscience - his divine core through which he can filter his actions to see which qualities predominate. Man will be under the wrong influence if he does not heed his *buddhi* or discriminating sense between vice and morality. If one follows the inner promptings one will attain the qualities of goodness, contentment, fear of God, humility, wisdom, success, honour - all giving rise to bliss. Sai Baba terms this 'angelic behaviour'. If not, and an individual persists in base behaviour, then his qualities will be insolence, impurity, pride, boastfulness, ego, regarding others as inferior etc.

By definition, God-realization is ineffable - words fail to convey its bliss and wonder. In the *MS* there is no attempt by Sai Baba to describe it, just some enumeration of preliminaries necessary to reaching it. Most of us do not know what God-realization is - so it is difficult to hold it fervently as a goal, as enjoined by Sai Baba. Elsewhere Sai Baba tells us, 'Herculean effort is necessary to the attainment of God. Who says he is out of reach? He is there in the tabernacle of the heart, nearer to us than the fingernail to the finger.'[7] But he does not describe the experience. However, we do have descriptions from Shekh Mahammad and Shah Muni to enlighten us. Shekh Mahammad lucidly describes his experience of God-realization as the ultimate experience of *fana*, the absorption into the essence of God:

> On reaching the pinnacle of Brahma (*brahmaragrha*), I experienced the light of a million suns. The life's movements (literally comings and goings) ceased to exist. The mind's power [to comprehend] became extinct. The atma-warrior's struggle to unite [with Brahma's essence] came to an end. The life's activities ceased (comings and goings). I became absorbed in myself. The [states of consciousness]: below, above, middle and emptiness were absorbed in God realization. In a pot full of water, the sun's reflection is steady, even if the pot is broken, the rays of the sun remain constant. I became fully preoccupied with myself. I could not see anyone but myself within me. The living and dead became non-distinct. I continually visualized myself. I was my witness. In that state I was not a man, not a woman, not a householder, not a renouncer and not a black, not a white person. I did not see any form. I had no back, no stomach, no middle, and no end. I was absorbed in God, but I could not see it. For me, there was no family, no *jati* (caste). There was no origin, no end. I was purer than any form. I was not a *yogi*, not a *fakir*, not a *lingayat* [*guru*], not a [*Sufi*] Kalandar, not an ascetic, and not a naked Jain. I was alone in my existence. I was different from 84 hundred thousand forms. I had no senses. I had no form, no feelings. Earth, water, light, and wind were merged in me; I was absorbed in them.[8]

Shah Muni declared that after his experience of realization - *brahmavilasa* - he reached the state of bliss.

> The foggy state of my illusory world disappeared, and my heart glowed with the light. I realised that I am Brahma, and after my realisation I reached the state of bliss. That state of bliss soon dissipated, and I then experienced that I was within me, and I was compressed within me and became contracted within myself. The feeling of freedom and bondage became meaningless. The whole sky became enveloped; all the seas became one. The sun

> became one with its rays; the moon absorbed its rays. Sound became enveloped in silence. There was no witness to the acts of attachments and detachments [to this existence]; who then should concern himself with release.[9]

Although Sai Baba does not describe his experience, there are descriptions of what it was like to be in the presence of a realized being. Mrs Manager says in an interview on May 21, 1936:

> There was such power and penetration in his glance that none could continue to look at his eyes. One felt that Sai Baba was reading him, or her, through and through. Soon one lowered one's eyes and bowed down. One felt that he was not only in one's heart, but in every atom of one's body. A few words, a gesture would reveal to one that Sai Baba knew all about the past, present and even future and about everything else. There was nothing else to do for one, except to submit trustfully and to surrender oneself to him.[10]

The Hierarchy of Saints or Spiritual Beings

Sufi lore, from very early times, holds that there is an ascending scale of nearness to God, which can be described as a hierarchy of celestial beings. These are the invisible rulers, or 'hidden ones', who are termed *awliya* (sing. *wali*) - literally 'friends of God', based on the *Qur'anic* statement: 'Surely those under God's care (*Awliya Allah*) have no ground for fear nor for grief.'[11] *Awliya* can also be living saints. Conceptually, there are on earth at any given time a host of saintly people who are working under God's direction for the good of the world, as opposed to ordinary people who are working out their own salvation. These saints all have different functions and special powers. The list of categories of saints starts with the *Qutb al-Aqtab*. Originally the word *qutb* meant literally an axis, pole or pivot - applied in this case to the pole around which the hierarchy of saints revolves. Over the centuries the word lost its original meaning, being reduced to a popular designation for *Sufi pirs*. Other words had to be used to denote the supreme function, such as *Qutb al-Aqtab*, literally the axis of the axes, or *al-Qutb al-Ghawth*, or *Qutb al-Alam*. Swan maintains that, 'As far as I can make out the *Qutb* is always a living saint but with extraordinary powers with regard to moving about from place to place... he may appear to be present in bodily form in two distant places at the same time.'[12] Trimingham notes: 'The inner *Sufi* doctrine... is that *wilaya* (saintship) is superior to *nubuwwa* (prophethood) as a function, in that the latter is passive and finite, while *wilaya* is ever active, timeless.'[13] Swan reiterates this notion: 'Every night in the realm above the earth there is a parliament of those saints (*Aulia*) [*sic*] in which are present not only the departed saints, but also many of the living saints, and all the affairs of the world are then settled....'[14] Al-Hujwiri also gives a comprehensive description of the hierarchy of saints saying:

> God has saints (*awliya*) whom He has specially distinguished by His friendship and whom He has chosen to be the governors of His kingdom and has marked out to manifest His actions and has peculiarly favoured with diverse kinds of miracles (*karamat*)....But of those who have power to loose and to bind and are the officers of the Divine court there are three hundred called *Akhyar*, and forty called *Abdal* and seven called *Abrar* and four called *Awtad*, and three *Nuqaba*, and one called *Qutb* or *Gawth*. All these know one another and cannot act save by mutual consent.[15]

The hierarchy of saints and their various roles in the world and cosmos was a topic taught extensively to Abdul by Sai Baba. He comments that to an unenlightened person, these saints appear like himself, but there is as much distinction as between earth and sky as between himself and these saints. In an eloquent description of the sweetness of God-realization, Sai Baba declares that only those who had experienced this divine insight could recognize these great Divine ones. Elsewhere he says that one should honour these special saints. The spiritual hierarchy given by Sai Baba is recorded in the *Saibaba MS* on pages 111-113 [K27-25]. The hierarchy given by Sai Baba is much more detailed than that of Al-Hujwiri. He lists the *Qutb-al-aqtab,* twelve *Qutbs; one Ghaus;* two *Imams;* 357 *Abdals* similar but inferior to *Qutbs*, with forty of these *Abdals* known as *Abrar;* four *Awtad*; four good men; three hundred people doing *parayana* of the *Qur'an;* seventy *Nuqaba;* seven *Akhyar;* four thousand *Mikwana;* and innumerable righteous people. There are a few variations from the other *Sufi* lists such as *Imams* who are not listed in traditional *Sufi* hierarchies, but they do feature in the *Saibaba MS* list. This hierarchy is listed twice in the *Saibaba MS* reflecting perhaps the importance Sai Baba gave to this traditional *Sufi* teaching. Sai Baba informs us that the earth is divided into seven spiritual kingdoms, each administered by an *abdal*. *Abdals*, according to Sai Baba, are very close to God and have been given special powers for specific duties. Only foolish people would mistake them for ordinary people. The *Saibaba MS* also indicates that there are 357 *abdals*, sometimes known as *abrar*, who live in the forests and mountains, and below them are four *awtad* who live in the four corners of the earth. '*Awtad*' literally means 'tent-pegs' - the image being of a tent with a central pole (*qutb*) around which there are four 'pegs' securing the four corners of the earth. Living so much at the material level, the common man is unaware of all the spiritual activity, protection and care that goes on at the subtle level.

There are hints in the literature of Sai Baba's role within the hierarchy of saints. Meher Baba seems to have been the most aware of Sai Baba's role in this connection, and he declared that, 'Sai Baba was the head of the spiritual hierarchy of his time...', and that he 'was not only a *Qutub*, but was the *Qutub-e-Irshad*, meaning the Chief of Spiritual Hierarchy of the Age, who brought the formless God into form and gave Him power.'[16] According to Meher Baba, Sai Baba had an important cosmic role to play in the Great World War of 1914-18.[17] Sai Baba's high spiritual status is alluded to in what is probably a *qawwali* or devotional song in the *Saibaba MS* pages 54 - 56 [K84 - K82] where it says that the *jinns* (spirits) as well as men are captivated by Sai Baba, and that he operated on two planes:

Who can sing the praises of our Sai Baba?
Every man is a slave of Sai Baba.
Spirits as well as men are captivated by Sai Baba.
God is our Beloved and takes the name of Sai Baba.
In the two worlds the name of Sai Baba resounds.
Sai Baba embodies the sacred texts, as also *Allah*.
We give Sai Baba all honours respectfully saluting and bowing before him.
Sai Baba operates on two planes, in Shirdi and all over the world.
Sai Baba is Supreme in both the present world and the next.
The whole universe is vibrant with Sai Baba.

Certainly the notion that such a saint could move around the world with extraordinary powers is tenable with Sai Baba, as he was reportedly seen in distant places, although in reality he never physically left Shirdi.

Linked with the the notion of way-stations in *Sufi* practice, are psycho-physical methods for purifying the heart, such as breath-control, concentration through *dhikr* - recollection of God's name, and visualization. This involves seeing subtle centres within the body called *lata'if*. Although these ideas were originally articulated in the thirteenth century, they were refined in India by the Naqshbandi Order of *Sufis*. They describe six subtle centres, each linked with a type of traveller on the spiritual path such as infidel (*kafir)*, believer (*musalman*) one who is faithful *(mu'min)* etc. Each is also linked with a particular prophet mentioned in the *Qur'an* such as Adam, Moses or Abraham, and a different colour - all leading to a mystical experience of light (*nur*) or spiritual enlightenment. Sai Baba appears to be explaining this system to Abdul, in the *Saibaba MS* pps 115-116 (K23 and K22], and although it is slightly different in detail, it is close enough to conclude that Sai Baba was speaking of these *Sufi* subtle centres to Abdul. On previous pages, the names of various prophets are mentioned and also the various types of travellers on the spiritual path.

NAQSHBANDI[18]	**SAI BABA**
1. arcanam (*akhfa*)	1. God (*zat*)
2. mystery (*khafi)*	2. light (*nur*)
3. conscience (*sirr)*	3. innermost heart - conscience (*sirr*)
4. soul (*nafs*)	4. spirit *(ruh*)
5. spirit (*ruh)*	5. heart (*dil*)
6. heart *(qalb*)	6. ego-self (*nafs)*[19]

According to Schimmel, the Naqshbandi tradition uses the *lata'if*, the subtle points in the body, as points on which to concentrate his *dhikr* or recollection of God's name until his whole being is transformed. *Dhikr qalbi* - in the heart at the left breast, *dhikr ruhi* - right side, *dhikr sirr* - left corner of the breast, *dhikr khafi* - right corner, *dhikr akhfa* - in the centre breast, and *dhikr nafs* - permeating the whole being. [20] The order and translation differ slightly with every interpreter, but the broad meaning is there.

The *Saibaba MS* also mentions angels on pages 120[K18] and 124[K14]. The topic may have arisen due to the many references to angels and the angelic world (*malakut*) in the *Qur'an* when opened at random by Abdul, and the fact that the *Qur'an* itself was recited to Mohammad by the angel Gabriel. According to the *Saibaba MS*, through his behaviour, man is degrading himself and has lost the awareness of his own true spiritual nature. For at one time, Sai Baba says, even the angels prostrated before man, so high was his spiritual status. The spiritual potentiality of man is compared to the mythological eagle Shahbaz, who could fly high above the atmosphere; man's consciousness can reach a far higher plane than animals, but the possibility also exists that he can sink lower than an animal, if he succumbs to his own lower instincts and desires - his *nafs*. When man's consciousness is not centred on God, then he will not act from inner divine prompting but from pride and ego, resulting in evil actions. As an example, the *Saibaba MS* quotes Maulana Rumi citing a number of times the case of Mansur al-Hallaj, where the wicked *qazis* acted from ulterior motives in hanging the renowned *Sufi* on the gallows.

Shathiyat of Abu Yazid al-Bistami and Mansur al-Hallaj

Shathiyat (sing. *shath)* are words uttered in a state of divine ecstasy and oneness with God. These ecstatic expressions do not fit into the orthodox view of Islam, and were not always accepted by conservative *Sufis*. The two medieval *Sufis* who are now famous for their ecstatic expressions or *shathiyat* are Abu Yazid Bayazid al-Bistami and Husayn Mansur al-Hallaj. As both these men are mentioned in the *Saibaba MS* we will examine their lives more closely. Both of these enigmatic saints were misunderstood in their own lifetime, and relegated to the fringes of Sufism, and have been alternately vilified or praised through the succeeding centuries. Remarkably, today their ecstatic expressions have come to represent the essence of Sufism. In their devotion they transcended all distinctions between 'I' and 'Thou' - the individual self and Divinity, merging like 'the wave with the ocean'. Abu Yazid reputedly shouted when in an ecstatic unitive state, '*Subhani*' which is variously translated as 'Glory to me' or 'Praise be to Me, how great is my majesty!'[21] The later ninth century mystic al-Hallaj declared in ecstasy '*Ana'l Haqq*', meaning, 'I am Creative Truth', or simply, 'I am God'. To the enlightened *Sufi*, these men were understood to have reached the pinnacle of unity with God, known as *tauhid*. But to Muslim orthodoxy both these ecstatic statements were blasphemous.

Ecstatic expressions such as those of al-Hallaj and Abu Yazid are the most famous of the 'theopathic locutions'. Ruzbihan Baqli Shirazi (1128-1209) collected 192 examples of *shathiyat* taken from the lives of saints and *Sufis* from the time of the Prophet up to the end of the twelfth century, and published them in a book entitled *Sharh-i Shathiyat* - Paradoxes of the *Sufis*. He found that, while many *Sufis* utter paradoxical statements in moments of revelation, Abu Yazid and al-Hallaj were the most prolific. Both these mystics have played a major role in the establishment of the *tasawwuf* or Islamic mysticism as separate from either *Sunni* or *Shi'i* Islam. Until these two mystics, the ideas of *Shi'i* Islam and Sufism had been interdependent.[22]

Abu Yazid, a *Sufi* from Bistam, in northwestern Iran in the latter half of the ninth century, was one of the first, along with

Rabi'a Basri, to enunciate the importance of the love of God as the impelling force towards attaining the goal of unity and identity with the Divine. Through his own mystical experience he was the first to enunciate the concept of *fana*, the annihilation of the human ego and the extinction of the carnal self or *nafs* and all its attributes, before the soul can experience the state of oneness with Godhead. Attar calls this *fana*, 'the supreme theopathic state of divine union when one is drowned in the ocean of love'.[23] He was convinced that one's true spiritual identity with God was veiled, and that once one could efface all one's human desires and ego in a purified heart, then the veil would be lifted. This philosophy lay behind his words, 'Under this cloak there is nothing but God' - a statement for which he was severely criticized by the orthodox *ulema*. Attar relates an anecdote about Abu Yazid, who upon seeing how shocked his disciples were at some of his apparently blasphemous statements made in an ecstatic state, gave permission for his disciples to kill him with the sword, if he committed this heresy again:

> A second time he went into ecstasy... his disciples rushed with swords to strike him, but found there were hundreds of Bayazids before them and they knew not who was the real Bayazid. So they struck all those forms with the sword, but felt they were striking in the air. However, when Bayazid recovered they narrated the whole incident to him. They found there were no sword marks on his body, and all the different forms had merged into the body of Bayazid.[24]

This story is re-told by Rumi in his *Mathnawi*. In his version the knife thrusts of his disciples only returned to hurt the disciples themselves because a 'Perfect' saint acts as a pure reflecting mirror.[25]

The other renowned medieval mystic, al-Hallaj, is known as the 'martyr of divine love' for he went to the gallows and was put to death by the combined forces of political expediency and exigent Muslim orthodoxy. His sin was that in an ecstatic state he uttered the words *'Ana'l Haqq'* - I am God. His influence on

Sufism was magnified by the horrific nature of his execution, hung from the gallows, his feet and hands cut off and finally decapitated before being burnt and his ashes thrown into the Tigris River. The argument on the genuineness of al-Hallaj has raged throughout the centuries, and only this century has Louis Massignon decoded and deciphered all the material on al-Hallaj, including the mystic's own writings and poetry.[26] He was punished for revealing abroad the ultimate divine esoteric secret, that at core everyone is divine - a secret which should not have been revealed, with the result that the ignorant misunderstood and killed his body. Rumi discusses *'Ana 'l Haqq'* in terms of *fana*:

> Take the famous utterance 'I am God'. Some men reckon it as a great pretension. But 'I am God' is in fact a great humility...He has naughted himself and cast himself to the winds. He says 'I am God' that is 'I am not', He is all, nothing has existence but God, I am pure non-entity, I am nothing.[27]

According to his Hindu biographers, Sai Baba also was known to say '*Ana 'l Haqq*' on occasion, in which they describe him as being 'in the Absolute mode'; the words were uttered while he was in a state of ecstasy or identification with God.[28] In his last decades his devotees record statements such as: "I am the Attributeless Absolute, Nirguna"; "I am *Parvardigar* (God)"; "All the Universe is in me"; "I am God (*Allah*)"; and, "I am formless and everywhere, I am in everything. I am in everything and beyond. I fill all space."[29] In former centuries Sai Baba would have been sent to the gallows and executed for such statements. Like Abu Yazid and al-Hallaj, Sai Baba would only make such pronouncements in an ecstatic mood, while in normal consciousness he would humbly depict himself as a servant of God. Narke, speaking of Sai Baba's moods, comments:

> No doubt in certain moods, he said (and I heard this myself), *Mai Allah hum* - I am God. But this was once in a way. His usual - *almost invariable* [Narasimhaswami's italics] - role was that of a devotee of God entrusted with

> vast powers to carry out what God (the *Fakir*) directs. "*Allah Malik*" (God is the Master), "*Allah Bhale Karenga*" (God will bless) were constantly on his lips. Also "I am God's slave, I remember God, etc."[30]

Sai Baba was also aware of the dangers of giving sacred information to the ignorant, and is apparently quoted on pages 124 [K14] and 120 [K18] in the *Saibaba MS*: "When the pen is in the hands of a wicked person, Mansur Hallaj was sent to the gallows. The judges were wicked and ignorant people." Abdul does not enlighten us further on what Sai Baba said on this point. Sai Baba's devotee, Professor Narke declares that 'this has been the strict injunction of my teacher Sri Sai Baba. The mouth instinctively closes when I try to mention my experiences.'[31] Another devotee affirms this point saying: 'Secrecy is essential for the success or perfect fruition of spiritual effort. This was, of course, Baba's practice and precept.'[32]

Sai Baba affirms the conclusion of these ancient *Sufis*, that God and the true self within are identical. He says that in reality you are God and not different from Him. He talks about this when talking to Appa Kulkarni's wife on the subject of death:

> Death and life are manifestations of God's activity. You cannot separate the two. God permeates all. However, none is born. None dies. See with your inner eye. Then you realise that you are God, and not different from him. Like a worn-out garment, the body is cast away by God.[33]

Rumi is also mentioned and quoted a number of times in the *Saibaba MS* and it is obvious that Sai Baba was familiar with his sayings, poetry and songs. Rumi was born in Balkh, Afghanistan and much of his life was spent in Konya which is in present day Turkey. His poetry became well-known throughout the regions of Iran and Turkey and then spread into India. The subcontinent of India has been particularly responsive to his *Sufi* path of love-mysticism disseminated mainly through his poetry, verses and lyrics. It was Rumi who introduced the notion of *sama*, the use of strong rhythmic mystical dance and devotional singing into the

Sufi path as a way to induce ecstasy known as *wajd*. In the Ottoman Empire this developed into the *Sufi* Order of Mevlevis, known as the 'Whirling Dervishes' where their particular circular style of dancing is used to 'neutralize the earth's glue' in order to produce ecstasy. This particular style of whirling did not spread to India, but the notion of music and mystical dances as integral to the *Sufi* path became an important part of the Chishtiyya Order. Many Indians flocked to the feet of Rumi as evidenced by the numerous tombstones of Indians who subsequently died in Konya.[34] Nizamuddin Aulyia who died in 1325, composed a commentary on Rumi's *Mathnawi*, and thereafter this work remained a fundamental part of the Chishti tradition. It can also be shown that Rumi's poetry, verses and quatrains known as *rubbaiyats*, became known all over northern and eastern India. Nor was his popularity restricted to the *Sufis* only, for it is well documented that the Mughal kings and court enjoyed Rumi, and there arose special *Mathnawi-khwans* whose job it was to recite Rumi's verses.

In his youth, we know that Sai Baba sang and danced in the manner of the *Sufis*, until around 1890 when he would have been around 52 years old.[35] Although, as has been discussed earlier, no definite link can be made between Sai Baba and Chisthtis, his familiarity with Rumi's poetry and song is highly suggestive of some influence. Musical sessions accompanied by Persian and Urdu songs and some of Kabir's songs, took place in the village *takya* or Muslim resthouse, where Sai Baba would dance wearing ankle bells. Das Ganu confirmed to Narasimhaswami that 'Sai Baba occasionally sang Musalman songs that I could not understand.'[36] It was the Chishtiyya Order of *Sufis* that used music as an aid to inducing ecstasy, and thus there is the hint that Sai Baba had some connection with Chishtis as he was so fond of music. Chota Khan records that 'people would do also *moulu* (songs of praise of God) every day, during day time before Baba at the mosque, and *kowali*[37] in the morning with *tabla* and *sarangi*'[38] One night there must have have been some wonderful *Sufi* music at the *masjid* during which Sai Baba was in rapture. Telling Abdul

Rangari about it the next day, he said they had 'abused' him meaning he was completely absorbed. Rangari replied, 'One who loves God would weep, laugh or dance as the songs of praise of God go on'. Sai Baba then asked Rangari about his *guru*, and on hearing that he was the Chishti Master, Habi Balishah Chishti Nizami, Sai Baba said: 'That is why you understand', for this well-known *Sufi* Master was accompanied by music wherever he went.[39]

Lax Religious Leaders and False Gurus Criticized

Sai Baba had many hard words for certain lax or venal Hindu *pujaris*, who as Brahmans should strictly maintain caste purity especially when eating. Similarly, the various categories of Islamic officials, the *Mullahs* (priests), *Alims* (scholars), *Mufti* (jurists) and *Qadis* (judges) are also accused of being corrupt. All are accused of accepting bribes, and compromising their high principles. Those unqualified individuals who set themselves up falsely as *gurus* (*Saibaba MS*, pages 118 [K20] and 120 [K18]) are denounced along with those who are ignorant of the meaning and purpose of ritual. Similarly those who don the *khirka*, the patched robe of the *pir*, and then proceed to pass themselves off as spiritual guides, are also severely criticized. He warns such people that they may be successful in fooling some people and in gaining temporary wealth and status in the world, but they should look ahead to the Day of Judgment! False *Sufis*, *faqirs* or *darvishes* who pass themselves off as true spiritual seekers, but who are just seeking an easy way to obtain the necessities of life without work, are again mentioned in the *Saibaba MS* (pp. 104-7 [K34-31]) He says of them, "Outwardly they are men in appearance - but in their heart they are satanic." In the *Qur'an* they are called satans, or fallen angels, and such beings are mentioned frequently. They are described as giving phoney pearls and jewels, probably meaning that it was relatively easy to learn by heart a few verses or 'pearls of wisdom', recount a few *Sufi* tales and legends concerning *Sufi awliya* and thus pass themselves off as pious seekers of truth. Begging for one's daily needs in the guise of a holy man may have been attractive to those who disliked working for a living. As long ago as the eleventh century, the *Sufi* Ruzbihan Baqli declared, 'I looked into Hell, and I saw that most of its inhabitants were those donning a patched frock and carrying a food-bowl.'[40] The patched frock had become a symbol for the *Sufi* mystics themselves and the begging bowl a symbol of their renunciation. The warning to beware of wicked or false *pirs*, who in their hearts are not truly dedicated to God, is being reiterated here, saying that there will be no rewards for such false *pirs* who are doing the most harm to themselves and their own *karma*, in the long run. The golden era of Sufism seems to have been from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, but later, due to the prevalence of such false *pirs* and aspirants, the purity of Sufism appears to have declined.

These warnings in the *Saibaba MS* are reminiscent of those given by Rumi. Rumi constantly refers to the necessity of following a *sheikh* or *pir,* and he adds a word of warning for the over-enthusiastic as there are many who are false *pirs.*[41] Ruzbihan Baqli Shirazi is quoted on page 105 [K33] of the *Saibaba MS* as saying: 'That *Sufi* who is not *safi* (pure) will be put into God's fire'. Al-Hujwiri makes a lament about his day (eleventh century), that could aptly be applied to the end of the twentieth century, today:

> ...the science of Sufism is obsolete...the whole people is occupied with following its lusts and has turned its back on the path of quietism (*rida*)...blind conformity has taken the place of spiritual enthusiasm... everyone makes pretensions, none attains to reality.[42]

Similarly, in the nineteenth century Sai Baba regretted the growing decay of faith in God, the growth of scepticism and the disposition to look on the dark side of things. He commented that today: "*faqirs* also are seldom dispassionate. It is hard to find a good *faqir*."[43]

Overall Significance of the Saibaba MS

It has been shown that the *Saibaba MS* contains a wealth of information crucial to our understanding of Sai Baba's deep *Sufi* worldview. An analysis of a few sections of the *Saibaba MS* has shown that Sai Baba was conversant with the *Qur'an*, the *Hadith*, the life of the Prophet Mohammad and his Companions, the early formation of Islam, and the establishment of the different sects within Islam, and the lives of early *Sufi* saints. It also includes very basic and fundamental teachings of Islam such as the names of the five times a day when *namaz* (prayers) should be said, the Schools of Jurisprudence, the traditional divisions of Islam - *shari'at* (Islamic law, the exoteric path); *tariqat* (the esoteric path or way of mysticism); and *haqiqat* (Reality, Truth). The *Saibaba MS* further reveals that Sai Baba had an extensive knowledge of the *Sufi* Orders and their *silsilas* (chain of leaders), *khanwadas* (spiritual 'family') and genealogies, and was familiar with the poetry and ideas of Jalal-uddin Rumi, and the biographies of Abu Yazid and al-Hallaj. Sufism is the mysticism of devotion, and throughout the *Saibaba MS* there are lists of names which may at first sight appear to have been picked somewhat arbitrarily, but on closer analysis these individuals are revealed to have been proponents of the devotional esoteric aspect of Islam, penetrating the veil of mystery in order to gain *ma'rifat*, the direct perception of God. Sai Baba's focus and message was single-mindedly toward God-realization, and he was not at all concerned with worldly power or political affairs, so that the political ambitions of Islam throughout history, and its power-driven proponents, were of no concern to him, and thus their names do not feature. As the spiritual goal was the primary concern of the *Sufis*, Sai Baba although termed a Muslim can more rightly be seen to have been a mystical *Sufi*.

Abdul, in informing us of the greatness of Sai Baba, compares his daily appearance in front of his *masjid* to meet the gathered crowd of visitors and devotees in Shirdi, with the *darbar* of a king in his Court. He says it was a Court of *qalandars*, or *faqirs*, and Sai Baba was the arch-*faqir* holding court for people coming to petition him for particular blessings. The biographies also refer to Sai Baba's *darbar*. So great is the spiritual power of Sai Baba, Abdul tells us, that even though there may be no child in a person's fate (*qismet*), Sai Baba can override destiny and grant the birth of a child to a childless couple. The *Sri Sai Saccarita* records a number of such instances. Abdul adds that it is a secret mystery and even he does not understand it.

Due to the fact that a gradual Hindu interpretation of Sai Baba has gained momentum since his passing, his *Sufi*-Muslim roots have become obscured and difficult to discern. Abdul's notes of Sai Baba's own words and the circumstances in which they came to be written are invaluable pieces of evidence in the effort to restore a balanced view of the saint. The notebook merits detailed scrutiny beyond what was possible here for this book. No doubt it will be the subject of further in-depth research by linguistic and religious scholars.

NOTES

1. A full list of the "Ninety-nine most beautiful names of God" is given in Carl W. Ernst Ph.D. *Sufism,* p. 82-84. In the *Saibaba MS* , Nos. 2, 4, 6, 7, 10, 16, 19, 20, 23, 24, 26-28, 33, 34, correlate with this list.
2. *Qur'an*, 20:8.
3. DE, p. 143.
4. Pertaining to 'Ali ibn Talib or his family.
5. Trimingham, *Sufi Orders in Islam*, pp. 133-36.
6. *Amir al-mum'minin - 'Ali ibn Abu Talib*, translated by William C. Chittick, and published recently as, *Supplications (Du'a)* (London: The Muhammadi Trust, n.d.).
7. M.V.Kamath and V.B.Kher, *Sai Baba of Shirdi - A Unique Saint*. Bombay: Jaico Publishing House, Introductory 'Words of Sai Baba' no page number.
8. YS, 18:40-75.
9. SB, 50:355-64.
10. DE, p. 64.
11. *Qur'an*, 10:62
12. Swan, *Study of Dervishism*, p. 19.
13. Trimingham, *Sufi Orders in Islam*, p. 163.
14. Swan, *Study of Dervishism*, p. 18.
15. HU, 14:7.
16. D.N. Irani, ed. *Sai Baba the Perfect Master*, pp. 15-16.
17. A.G. Munsiff, *Meher Baba Journal*, 1942, quoted in Irani, ed. *Sai Baba the Perfect Master*, p. 98.
18. See Ernst,, p. 107.
19. This is the translation for *nafs* used throughout this book.

20. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p. 174.
21. Schimmel writes: "This typical *shath* has puzzled many later mystics and has often been repeated by the poets of Iran and Turkey and Muslim India as proof of the unitive state reached by the perfected mystic. Sarraj, to give one example of Sufi interptretation, understands [Abu Yazid] to be talking "as if he was reciting the Koranic word: 'I am God, there is no God beside Me' (*sura* 20:14)." *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 49.
22. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 42.
23. Attar, *Muslims, Saints and Mystics*, p. xxvii.
24. Attar, *Muslims, Saints and Mystics*, p. 65.
25. Rumi, *Mathnawi*, 4:2102-40, quoted in Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 50.
26. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 64-65 n. 39.
27. Schimmel, *Triumphal Sun*, p. 205.
28. CS, No. 61.
29. CS, No. 66. See also section entitled, 'Baba's Sayings', SSG, pp. 9-13.
30. DE, pp. 26-7.
31. DE, p. 13.
32. DE, p. 4.
33. CS, No. 313A.
34. Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, p. 375.
35. CS, No. 201.
36. DE, p. 135.
37. The more common spelling in the west is *qawwali*, and these are Sufi devotional songs whose aim is to transport the listener to a higher state of mind, leading to enlightenment.
38. DE, p. 279.
39. LSB, III:179.
40. Ruzbihan Baqli, "*Sharh-i Shathiyat": Les Paradoxes des Soufis*, ed. Henri Corbin (Tehran and Paris, 1966), quoted in Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 21.
41. Chittick, *Supplications (Du'a)*, p. 120.
42. HU, p. 7.
43. CS, No. 152.

Part III

Sai Baba - A New Perspective

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Hindu Embrace of Sai Baba

In consideration of the apparent Hindu interpretation of Sai Baba that has gained momentum since his death in 1918, it is important to note that while *Sufism* itself was a vital force playing a significant role in the religious life of India from the medieval period onwards, it has been declining throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to the point where today it has practically died out. Echoes of the greatness still exist in isolated contemporary groups like the Iranian Nimatullah *Sufis,* based in England, and in performances of some of the artistic *Sufi* practices with music and dance. The great *Sufi* Orders of the past, however, are no longer in operation as institutions, and few Muslims,are willing to follow the austere world-renouncing *Sufi* path. In India I met a number of individuals whose fathers or grandfathers were famous *Sufi* Masters, but the present generation has opted to become school-masters or to pursue professional careers. This century has also seen the rapid growth of Islamic fundamentalism, which largely precludes *Sufi* mysticism being intolerant of its apparent unorthodoxy. Sai Baba was probably one of the last truly ascetic *Sufi* mystics who attained God-realization and became a great *Sufi* Master, although considered to be heterodox by many orthodox Muslims. He has not, therefore, been vigorously claimed as one of their own by the minority Muslim community in the Deccan, ever since his Muslim devotees were out-voted regarding the place and manner in which Sai Baba's body should be buried. On the other hand the Hindu majority soon recognized the greatness of Sai Baba and claimed him by honouring him in their own way. Without their ardent devotion, the name and message of Sai Baba may well have passed into obscurity.

Within the warm embrace of the Hindu *bhaktas*, Sai Baba has unwittingly been given a Hindu gloss, while his Muslim and *Sufi* features have been slowly submerged. This process was not deliberate or intentional on the part of the Hindus, but is typical of the way *Hinduism* has traditionally assimilated new ideas and saintly people. One can see this same process occurring as we speak, with the death of Mother Teresa, who, while she was a Christian and a Catholic dedicated to Jesus Christ, has been adopted and assimilated by the Hindus. Julian West, writing in the Sunday Telegraph, reported that in Bengal she has already been transformed into a Hindu goddess. He writes, 'At the city's last festival of Kali, a statue of the bloodthirsty deity was wrapped in Mother Teresa's trademark, a blue-bordered white sari. It was immersed in the Hoogli river to the accompaniment of ancient Hindu rites. Kali, who also embodies compassion, is the reigning goddess of Calcutta and Mother Teresa is widely regarded as that city's great saint.'[1]

As *Sufism* declined, so general knowledge of *Sufi* ideals and precepts has become almost non-existent among the Hindu community in the Bombay Presidency. Today, echoes of *Sufism* are kept alive only at the folk level where once a year *urs* festivals are held all over Maharashtra to honour the great *Sufi* saints of the past at their *dargahs*, which are still preserved by the saint's family or *pirzada*. Both Hindus and Muslims flock to these festivals for the blessing of the saint and for his curative power which is said to be still active even from the tomb. As has been described earlier, a festival was arranged to honour Sai Baba in Shirdi in 1897, which, because he was a *Sufi* mystic, had perforce to be a Muslim festival. Thus it was that an unquestionably Muslim *urs* festival was held to honour Sai Baba every year thereafter, an event which continued for fifteen years until 1912. At that date, it was suggested that it be held jointly with the Hindu *Ramanavami* celebration, and thus it was for many years. Today, however, the *urs* has been completely over-shadowed and dominated by the *Ramanavami* celebrations and its Muslim origin all but forgotten. Sai Baba originally agreed to a joint festival to accommodate the growing number of Hindu devotees who came to Shirdi during his final eight years. It has also been related how, for three to four years after Sai Baba passed away, from 1918-1922, Abdul Baba was the sole custodian of the tomb, but he himself was a penniless *faqir* with no institutional resources. When Hari Sitaram Dikshit revisited Shirdi in 1922, he observed that the shrine was not being cared for adequately, and challenged Abdul's authority over the tomb. He set up a Public Trust or *Sansthan* through the District Court to administer the shrine complex, which was comprised of a majority of Hindus. From then on the simple tomb and shrine became the *Samadhi Mandir* and many Hindu rituals were established in the following years.

In the eighty or so years since the death of Sai Baba, his image has been slowly transformed from that of an obscure ascetic Muslim *faqir* into that of a popular Hindu saint worshipped with full traditional pomp, grandeur, rituals, *abhisekam*, garlands, *puja* and *arati*, in a manner usually reserved for Hindu deities. In fact many regard Sai Baba as the very incarnation of Divinity, and popular poster paintings of Sai Baba reflect this (*see* Plate 30 showing him with the Shiva *lingam*). This opinion is also reinforced in a recent conversation I had with Mr. Dabholkar, the grandson of the author of *Sri Sai Saccarita,* about the name 'Sai'. He gave me a very Brahmin interpretation, saying that it stood for *sakshat iswara* (incarnation of God), 'Sai' being derived from the first two letters of *sakshat* and the 'i' of *iswara*. While appearing somewhat contrived, this modern-day interpretation is, among a number of similar ones, a valid explanation from a Hindu point of view. However, as noted earlier, wandering *Sufi faqirs* in the nineteenth century were known generically by the Persian term *sa'ih* or *sayyah*, and this is probably the origin of the name 'Sai'. It is not my purpose to undermine any form of devotion which Sai Baba himself inspired or indeed to deny Sai Baba's universal qualities. On the other hand, it is an incontrovertible fact that all great prophets, saints and sages have emerged out of a particular religious tradition, and we can better understand their message by being aware of that tradition. For example, Jesus is better understood by knowing his Judaic roots, and the Buddha by understanding his Hindu background. My research has revealed that Sai Baba's thought and path to God-realization were shaped within the *Sufi* tradition. How then has he come to be perceived by many as a Hindu saint? In this chapter we examine the gradual Hindu interpretation and the subtle nature of the resulting Hindu gloss.

Much has been written about the assimilation of the Muslims into Indian culture since their military and political conquest of north India in the medieval period, and their relentless conversion of Hindus, particularly those of low caste, to Islam. However, there is very little material on the reverse process, that of the Hinduization of Muslim elements in the spiritual domain. Recent scholars working on *Sufis* in medieval India, such as Bruce Lawrence's enquiry into early Indo-Muslim saints and conversion[2], Richard Eaton and his work on the *Sufis* of Bijapur[3] and Carl Ernst's study of the *Sufis* of Khuldabad[4], have assiduously studied various aspects of *Sufi silsilas*, the individual *Sufi* masters and their writings and sayings in Persian and Urdu, and their efforts at conversion of Hindus to Islam. Bruce Lawrence, for example, has focused on the Chishtiyya and Qadiriyya Orders and the important role the Chishtis played in popularizing *sama*, which is a *Sufi* technique involving music and singing to induce correct emotional states for achieving God-realization.[5] Eaton identified numerous social roles that the *Sufis* adopted in Bijapur, while Ernst concentrated his research on the *Sufis* of Khuldabad, a small town situated within a hundred miles of Shirdi, Sai Baba's arena of activity. However, Ernst has only cursorily surveyed - four pages in his book - the Maharashtrian Hindu reaction to the Muslims through the writings of Hindu-Muslim poet-saints, such as Eknath and Ramdas. While doing so, he has focused more on Hindu-Muslim confrontation than Hindu-Muslim rapprochement. Ernst, Lawrence and Eaton all seem to be oblivious of the contribution of the Maharashtrian Muslim *Sufi* poet-saints, such as Shah Muntoji, Shekh Mahammad and Shah Muni. Also they have not discussed the Hindu influence on *Sufi* saints and their accommodation to the Hindu mode of thinking, which is a key component of the Maharashtrian *Sufi* teachings from Shah Muntoji to Sai Baba.

A casual visitor today to the shrine of Sai Baba at Shirdi may well go away with the impression that this is the shrine of a Hindu holy man who is sometimes unaccountably referred to as a Muslim *faqir*. If he were there early in the morning, he would witness such typical Hindu practices as the *kakad arati* - waving the sacred flame, and the *abhisekam* - ritual bathing with rose water and milk of the marble figure, after which the *murti* of Sai Baba is dried and redraped in a fresh cloth. The larger-than-life marble *murti* of Sai Baba, seated on an elaborate silver throne situated behind the tomb, is treated as a living God, and is duly looked after throughout the day, given food offerings and put to bed at night, practices totally alien to Islam which forbids the worship of any anthropomorphic representation of the divine. As noted earlier, as soon as the white marble figure of Sai Baba was installed behind the tomb, many Muslims at once stopped coming and also, according to Rahim Khan, Abdul's grandson, the wandering *faqir* community immediately ceased visiting the shrine. During the day various *pujas* and *bhajans* are performed, and offerings are made of flower garlands or *malas*, incense or *agarbatti*, coconuts, and pieces of cloth to be blessed, by the constant stream of devotees and those seeking boons. While the Sri Sai Baba *Sansthan* in Shirdi maintains that all religions are represented among the devotees, the majority by far are Hindus, mostly from Maharashtra State and in particular from Bombay. Given this elaborate Hindu ritual and the appearance of idol worship, and also the fact that the devotees present are virtually all Hindu, any new visitor would easily conclude that Sai Baba was a saint in the Hindu tradition.

However, according to Sri Narayan Asram, it was only after 1910 that 'the Bombay crowds began to pour upon Shirdi'.[6] Significant changes then began to occur. He says:

> The Baba was being pressed into new habits and ways. Devotees to suit their own tastes forced numerous forms

> and observations on Baba and made him a mere man shining with the aid of the shows they arranged for him. His real greatness shone by itself without forms and rigid observances and pomp, and was shut out by these. These reduced Baba to earthly grandeur.[7]

These visitors and devotees were mainly Hindu, many of whom were Brahmins drawn from a professional, highly educated elite from the legal, political and administrative segments of Bombay society. They came to Shirdi after hearing the praises of Sai Baba sung by Das Ganu in his public *kirtans* throughout Maharashtra, or through the recommendation of Nana Chandorkar, an influential public figure and a Deputy Collector in the Government at Bombay. It was through their powerful influence and strong endorsement of Sai Baba that many Hindus were drawn to Shirdi to visit him. Although impressed with Sai Baba on a personal level and attracted by his miracles, nevertheless many Brahmin visitors found Sai Baba's obvious Muslim appearance to be an obstacle. Even the upstanding Nana Chandorkar had to be personally invited three or four times by Sai Baba himself, before he would condescend to visit a Muslim *faqir*. He was in fact one of the few people that Sai Baba openly summoned to his presence.[8] When he finally arrived, Sai Baba informed him of his connection with him over four lifetimes. Although Nana Chandorkar's very orthodox father originally objected to his son seeing a Muslim saint, Sai Baba mystically obtained his approval, and Nana Chandorkar eventually became one of Sai Baba's closest and most ardent disciples and advocates.

Before 1910, reading between the lines so to speak, from hints dropped in the accounts of devotees of their experiences of Sai Baba, we can conclude that Sai Baba acted as a *pir* to a substantial floating itinerant *faqir* community known to exist at the turn of the century in rural Maharashtra. Unfortunately there are few written accounts of how Sai Baba spoke to or taught the numerous *faqirs* that came to see him, or the advice he gave them, unlike the volumes of testimonials written by his Hindu followers who obviously felt a duty to history to preserve their unique experience of the sage. As a result we know a great deal of his teaching directed to the Hindu householders. One rare account we do have of his advice in the role of *pir*, concerns a certain Shaikh Abdulla who came to Sai Baba seeking help in resolving a spiritual block. Inwardly perceiving that his problem was an over-attachment to his lands and property, Sai Baba recommended complete detachment from the world, saying, "If we die today...what is the use of house, lands etc. to us?"[9] The Shaikh obeyed the command, abandoned his property, and after some time developed amazing miraculous powers - an indication that his spiritual block had gone. We also know that Sai Baba raised certain rare *faqirs* to saintly status - for instance a *faqir* called Hila Beg who had come and stayed in Shirdi, was instructed by Sai Baba to change his name to Punjab Shah, and go and live in Aurangabad, eating only what he was given. Obviously Sai Baba recognised that he had reached a high level of spirituality on the *Sufi* path, and could help others.[10]

Sai Baba had the reputation of being generous to *faqirs*, both feeding them and, on occasion, giving money for them to go on pilgrimage. However he was selective in those to whom he gave money, giving *rupees* to householders like Bade Baba and Tatya Patel, while others like Abdul and Mhalsapati were kept strictly on a renunciate path and never received money from Sai Baba. So, as he treated householders on an individual basis for their spiritual progress, it is probable that he treated visiting *faqirs* according to their individual development along the *Sufi* path. There are further clues in the accounts of devotees' experiences that Sai Baba must have had frequent contact with *faqirs* in the period before the turn of the century from as early as 1858, in the references to the *takya* in Shirdi village. The *takya* was specifically a lodge for Muslim travellers and was 'where faqirs used to sit'.[11] Elsewhere we are told that, 'before Baba came to live in this *masjid*, He lived for a long time in a place, *takia* [sic], where, with *ghungur* (small bells) on his legs, Baba danced beautifully and sang with tender love.'[12] *Faqirs* were transients, coming and going all the time, but we know that some of them returned to Shirdi many times, such as Pir Mohammad whom Sai Baba called Bade Baba, and for whom he had a high regard. Narasimhaswami in his search in the 1930's for Muslim contacts with Sai Baba, lists a number of *faqirs* who came to Shirdi, but they are few compared to the numbers of Hindus he interviewed. It seems that *Sufi faqirs* were only mentioned specifically when it was important to the understanding of a story concerning Sai Baba. Such an instance occurred a few months before Sai Baba died, and the incident was recorded in detail. Sai Baba, sensing his own imminent demise, sent word to two *faqirs* living in Aurangabad. They were obviously dear friends in the past, and it is known that Sai Baba spent some time in Aurangabad before settling in Shirdi. According to Islamic practice certain rituals have to be performed before death, involving feeding the poor and singing devotional songs, and so Sai Baba sent word to inform these two *Sufis* in Aurangabad, requesting that these rites be performed. He sent Kasim, the *faqir* Bade Baba's son, to Faqir Shamsuddin Mea, with some *poli* (rice with boiled fowls). He also sent him two hundred and fifty rupees requesting him to conduct special *moulu* - musical performances, and *qawwalis* - devotional songs. He also requested that *nyas* or special food should be prepared and distributed to the poor. To the other *faqir*, Bannemian, who was an eminent Aurangabad *Sufi* in his own right, he sent a garland of Javandi flowers and two hundred and fifty rupees with Kasim, who was to say to Bannemian, "On the ninth day of the ninth month, *Allah* himself takes away the lamp which *Allah* has placed. Such is *Allah's* mercy."[13] The two were obviously upset to learn the news as old friends would be, but what the exact relationship, history and connection was between these two *Sufis* and Sai Baba has passed unrecorded from history.

The overall impression that one is left with, after collecting all the references of Sai Baba's role before the Hindus came, is that he had a great deal of contact with visiting *faqirs* throughout his six decades in Shirdi, guiding and helping them in their spiritual quest. Abdul informs us that several faqirs and saints came to see Sai Baba.[14] On the other hand, there are a number of accounts describing the utter dismay of certain Hindu visitors who, on approaching the *masjid,* observed for the first time the saint's obvious Muslim appearance and association.[15] In fact, a number of orthodox Brahmins adamantly refused to go too close to the saint in case they were ritually polluted.[16] One case already cited, of the caste-proud orthodox Brahmin from Nasik, called Mule Shastri, who adamantly refused to go too close to Sai Baba until he saw his own Hindu guru in a vision in place of Sai Baba.[17] Only then was he willing to touch the feet of the Master. Another orthodox Brahmin, who admitted to being averse to things being touched by 'Moslems' and untouchables, was told in a dream by Sai Baba not to care for this untouchability so much.[18] A further instance concerned Megha, a devout Brahmin and devotee of Shiva, who was sent to Shirdi by Hari Vinayak Sathe. On hearing at Broach railway station that Sai Baba was a Muslim, he was so perturbed about bowing to him that he begged Sathe not to send him. Sathe ignored his pleas and when Megha arrived at the *mosque*, Sai Baba, reading his mind, was very angry and shouted for him to get away, saying that Megha was a high caste Brahmin and would lose his caste if he bowed to him. Megha went away but later returned and became an ardent devotee of Sai Baba to the point where, at his death, Sai Baba said of him "This was a true devotee of mine".[19] There are a number of places already referred to, where Sai Baba refers to his own Muslim status. On one occasion, he said, "I am myself a devotee of *Rangari*, though the Hindus worship me". *Rangari* is a Muslim name for God.

On the other hand, it can be said with some truth that Sai Baba himself laid the foundation for a Hindu interpretation of him, for in the last eight or so years of his life, he acceded to his Hindu devotees' love of religious display, pomp and ceremony in order to please them. For example, at the insistence of his devotees he reluctantly agreed to a procession with music, dancing and fireworks, from the *masjid* to the *chavadi* where he slept on alternate nights. A description from that time sets the scene:

> Groups of men and women with *tal, chiplis, kartal, mridang, khanjira, veena* and other musical instruments

> formed the vanguard of the procession. A long line of *raths* followed behind. Next came the richly caparisoned horse, Syamakarna, which Sai Baba fondled and loved. Behind the horse was a palanquin borne by men who sang hymns, accompanied by many torchbearers on both sides. There were others with canes, silver sticks, poles with flags, bearers of poles with carved figures of Garuda on their crests. They danced in joy, shouting *Jai*, to the tune of drums and trumpets. Fireworks announced the approach of the procession through sound and the brilliance of sudden flashes of multicoloured light. Baba appeared on the steps of the *masjid* with persons holding yak tail *cowries* on each side of him. The Bhaldars announced His appearance by shouting His name. Devotees spread folds of cloth on the road, as He moved along. An umbrella was held over His head; flowers besmeared with *gulal* were showered on Him as He proceeded slowly.[20]

This performance, it must be stressed, occurred only at the very end of his life, and for the fifty or more years prior to this incident he did not allow anyone to worship him at all, especially forbidding ostentatious Hindu rituals and ceremonies. Later he also allowed *arati*, the traditional Hindu practice of waving a camphor flame while a song of praise extolling his divine qualities was sung, to be performed on his route between the *masjid* and the *chavadi* (*see* Plate 31. Note the ornamental umbrella, the garland of flowers in the devotee's hand and the plate with *puja* items including coconuts held by the boy). *Arati* is a ritual most commonly reserved for Hindu deities such as Rama, Krishna, Ganesha or Shiva, although it is occasionally offered by devotees to honour the divine within their chosen *guru*.[21] It was Das Ganu who composed a special *arati* or song of praise to celebrate the divinity of Sai Baba, and this is still used in the daily worship in the Shirdi *mandir* today. During the last few years of the saint's life thousands of new visitors and devotees came to Shirdi, so it is not surprising that, witnessing all this pomp and ceremony, they would conclude that the saint was more Hindu than Muslim. These types of events, which occurred only in his last few years, gave a strong impetus to the subsequent Hindu interpretation of the saint.

Soon after Sai Baba's death it was realized that his burial place would become an important shrine as he was already recognized as a great saint or *awliya,* and that in the future it would become a pilgrimage centre attracting innumerable visitors. The Muslims wanted to claim the saint's body, bury him in open ground, and build a *dargah* over the burial mound, but they were few in number and possessed neither the influence nor the financial means to build a suitably impressive tomb, similar to those found all over Maharashtra. As indicated earlier some of these *dargahs* were enormous domed stone structures. As the majority of devotees in Shirdi at this time were Hindus, their will in the end prevailed, and Sai Baba was buried in the centre of the courtyard of the new Buty *wada*, which was the mansion-cum-guest-house built by the millionaire Mr. Buty, and where a *Muralidhar* - a statue of Krishna with the flute - was originally planned to be installed. This place was appropriated for Sai Baba's tomb and according to the biographers, Sai Baba himself had given hints that this was the place where he was to be buried. It should be noted that the bodies of saints in the Hindu tradition are generally buried, rather than burnt on the funeral pyre. Thus the burial-place of Sai Baba was legitimized for the Hindu devotees, and the Buty mansion became the *Samadhi Mandir*.

Although Sai Baba's tomb was called a *samadhi*, the Hindu term for the tomb of a saint, the Hindu devotees were sensitive enough to Muslim custom initially to allow its appearance to resemble a Maharashtrian *dargah*, as a mark of deference to the recently deceased saint. The tomb was shrouded in the Muslim manner with a cloth *gilaf*, on top of which devotees' flower offerings were piled. A railing was placed around the area, and only a photograph of the saint seated in his characteristic pose of one leg raised resting over the other, was placed there (*see* Plates 12, 13 & 25). Abdul, Sai Baba's Muslim servant and disciple, became the sole keeper of the *dargah* for a few years, following Sai Baba's demise. This arrangement was acceptable to both Hindus and Muslims, until Abdul's authority over the tomb was successfully challenged in 1922 by Hari Sitaram Dikshit, when a Trust or *Sansthan* was set up. The result was that Abdul was effectively removed from his position as custodian of the tomb and denied any rights or privileges, although, as described earlier, these restrictions were later relaxed. Any Muslim influence over Sai Baba's shrine was thereby eradicated, as the new official *Sansthan* was comprised totally of Hindu members. In 1952, two years before Abdul's death, the *Sansthan* installed a large imposing marble *murti* of Sai Baba immediately behind the tomb, a *murti* which had been especially created by Balaji Vasant Talim of Bombay (*see* Plate 32 showing the tomb and *murti* as it is today). By this act the Hindus publicly laid claim to the saint. After Abdul's death a few years later, the *Sansthan* installed the *murti* on a silver throne with a silver umbrella over it. Above the *murti* the Hindu devotees placed a painted sign which read: *Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram, Patita Pavana Sainam*, which means 'King of the Raghu Dynasty, Lord Ram, who is also known as Sai, is the uplifter of the downtrodden'. The word *Sainam* replaced the *Sita Ram* of the original *bhajan*. This identification of Sai Baba with the Hindu god Ram, with its overtly Hindu symbolism, was untenable to most orthodox Muslims. It also proved offensive to the wandering Sufi *faqirs*, and had the immediate effect of terminating the visits of the numerous itinerant *faqirs* who until 1952 were frequent visitors to the Shirdi shrine.[22] Since his death Sai Baba has been hailed as the arbiter of Hindu-Muslim unity and harmony. Unfortunately, the act of placing a statue in the Shirdi Mandir effectively sends the oppposite message.

If Sai Baba lived in Shirdi from around 1858 until his death in 1918, then this amounts to a time period of some sixty years, of which only the last ten years were recorded in any detail. In those days in rural India, information was passed orally. By the time Sai Baba became well known, many of the people who knew him as a youth would have passed away. Thus, little verifiable historical data can be gleaned from Sai Baba's early decades and information tends to be mainly hagiographical. Most of our information about Sai Baba has been mediated through books, because it is now more than three-quarters of a century since his demise, and everyone who knew him personally has now passed away. In the experience of this researcher, when interviewing some local Hindus, including elders, in Shirdi recently, I found that for the most part they can only repeat information and stories culled from books such as the *Sri Sai Saccarita*. The major biographies of Sai Baba were written for the most part after his death. Although *Sri Sai Saccarita* was started by Dabholkar around 1910 during Sai Baba's lifetime, at his death in 1918 only two of the final fifty-three chapters had been written, and the biography was not completed and published until 1929. Research for Narasimhaswami's four-volume *Life of Sai Baba* was not started until 1936, eighteen years after the physical demise of the sage, and was not completed and published until 1955-56. Thus there was plenty of scope for the Hindu view and interpretation of Sai Baba to take root and grow. These, and the more recent authors, are nearly all Hindu, or have left unquestioned the Hindu view, and generally possess only rudimentary knowledge of Islam and Sufism, its language and beliefs. Unfortunately, there has been no Muslim biographer of Sai Baba.[23] The Hindu authors, who have been equivocal in acknowledging the Muslim origin of Sai Baba, have without exception proceeded to interpret him from a Hindu, and in most cases, a Vedantic viewpoint. For example, one of Narasimhaswami's standard pre-set questions to all the devotees he interviewed was whether they thought that Sai Baba taught Vedanta, and in all cases they said he did not. The term Vedanta to a Hindu generally means the *advaita* philosophy of Sankaracarya, with its concept of non-duality and *maya*, the veil of illusion, that gives the world an appearance of separateness. But true *advaita* - God is one without a second, is similar to the *Sufi tauhid* or Oneness of God. While Sai Baba did not teach *advaita* Vedanta specifically, he did teach the *tauhid*, and this was his constant theme. Dabholkar clarifies the meaning of Sai Baba's *Vedanta* as the Oneness of God:

> [Sai Baba] talked and laughed. On his tongue there was a refrain, *Allah malik* (God is the only master). He disliked any thought contrary to this assertion and would not tolerate any dissent [to his conviction]. In his speech you could always discover the entire [meaning] of Vedanta (Oneness of God).

It is worth scrutinizing the background of the biographers for their knowledge of both Islam and Hinduism as well as the degree of Hindu bias that might be operating in their accounts of Sai Baba. Govindrao Raghunath Dabholkar, Sai Baba's biographer, came to hear of Sai Baba through Nana Chandorkar in 1910, and interacted intermittently with Sai Baba for the following eight years until the saint's death. Dabholkar, known to his friends as Annasaheb, was affectionately called 'Hemadpant' by Sai Baba. The search for an understanding of Dabholkar led me to a large imposing house in Khar in a suburb of Bombay, the family home of Mr. Dabholkar which is still lived in by his grandson and his family. This family is very gracious and open in talking to visitors and making photographs available. They are eager to show the actual items mentioned in *Sri Sai Saccarita*, such as the oval picture of Sai Baba (referred to earlier as one of the Muslim pictures),[24] as well as the knee-high polished wooden writing desk with its sloping surface where the book was mostly written and finally completed in 1929. Going to this house was like going back sixty years in time, with the altar in the kitchen appearing much as it must have been during Sai Baba's lifetime. It was the witnessing of a *leela* or small miracle of Sai Baba that inspired Dabholkar to write down some of these miraculous occurrences for the benefit of future devotees. This *leela* occurred when he observed that a cholera epidemic subsided almost immediately after Sai Baba ground wheat into flour, and had it scattered around the perimeter of the village as mystical protection. Typically, searching Hindu philosophy for a spiritual explanation of the wheat-grinding incident, Dabholkar designated the two mill stones as *karma* (action) and *bhakti* (devotion) and the mill handle as *jnana* (wisdom). Thus, he interpreted Sai Baba as grinding away our sins, and our mental and physical afflictions including *ahamkara* (ego) and the three *gunas* or qualities of *sattva* (purity), *rajas* (energy) and *tamas* (lethargy), until pure self-realization is reached.[25] He includes this lengthy explanation in his book and this is clearly a Hindu gloss which foreshadowed many such glosses associated with Sai Baba's teachings in the biographies written by Hindus. Taking the same incident, let us see how a *Sufi* biographer might have interpreted it. The wheat chaff, according to the *Sufi* may well have been so many veils, which, through undergoing the process of winnowing, symbolizing ascetic practices and following the stations of the *Sufi tariqat*, are gradually peeled away with the aid of the two mill stones of *nista* and *saburi* which are faith in God and patience (two qualities often stressed by Sai Baba), revealing the pure unadulterated flour symbolic of one's pure divine nature. This *Sufi* interpretation is equally plausible and valid. Had Sai Baba's first biographer been a *Sufi*-Muslim, this explanation might well be popular today instead of the Hindu interpretation.

Although Dabholkar recorded Sai Baba's life and teachings from his own Hindu perspective, invoking the Hindu deities and Hindu *sastras*, he nevertheless included many Muslim incidents. Gunaji, on the other hand, omitted most of the references to Sai Baba's Muslim aspects. For example, when Sai Baba on one occasion declared himself to be a Muslim saying, "I am of the Muslim caste (*mi jatica Musalman*)", recorded by Dabholkar, this section was not translated and not included in Gunaji's English adaptation.[26] The incident arose as follows. Only the Brahmin priest, Mhalsapati was normally allowed the privilege of applying sandal paste to Sai Baba's throat. However, on one occasion a Dr. Pandit took the sandal paste and applied it to Sai Baba's forehead in three horizontal lines, called the *tripundra*, according to the *saiva* tradition. Later, on being questioned why he allowed the doctor to do this when he had refused others this privilege, Sai Baba replied:

> His *guru* is Brahmin. **I am of the Muslim caste** [emphasis added], but he (Pandit) thought of me as his own *guru* and was performing ritual worship to the *guru* (*guru-puja).* He did not even entertain the thought that he himself was a pure Brahman and that I was an unclean *yavana*.[27]

Thus, Sai Baba is saying that although his tradition was *Sufi*-Muslim, he was accommodating himself to the Hindu ritual, but this important Muslim reference is subtly omitted by Gunaji. In one place Dabholkar writes: 'it does not really matter whether Sai Baba was Hindu or Muslim, but Shirdi was fortunate to have Baba'[28], and on another occasion he says, 'by drawing inferences or guessing, some people would say that Sai is a Brahman and others would say he is a *Musalman*, despite the fact that he is without caste (*jati vihina*) due to the fact that his social origins were unknown.'[29] Gunaji, in his adaptation, appears to be impartial by asking rhetorically how he could be either a Muslim or a Brahmin. But he then proceeds to demolish the argument that Sai Baba could possibly be a Muslim saying:

> If He was a Moslem, how could He keep a *dhuni* fire ever-burning in the *masjid*, how could there be a Tulsi Vrindavan there, how could He allow the blowing of conches and ringing of bells and playing of musical instruments and how could He allow all the different forms of Hindu worship, there? Had He been a Moslem [sic], could He have pierced ears and could He have spent money from his pocket for repairing Hindu temples? On the contrary, He never tolerated the slightest disrespect to Hindu shrines and Deities.[30]

Thus Gunaji puts forward all the arguments that Sai Baba is Hindu, apparently without realizing that Sai Baba could be accommodating to their devotional customs out of love for his devotees. Gunaji probably thought quite genuinely of Sai Baba in Hindu terms and in his own mind was performing a service by rendering the stories and text into a form more accessible to his fellow Hindus. On the other hand a devotee named Khusa Bhav told Narasimhaswami: 'I never heard him say anything about *maya* or *Brahma* or *Mahavakya tatwas* or *viveka* and *sadhana chathusthya*. He imparted faith to those resorting to him - faith in *Ishvara* by exercising his wonderful powers.'[31] These are all Hindu concepts which would normally pepper the conversation of a *guru*.

The theme of Sai Baba's Muslim identity was broached by Das Ganu in his 1918 *Shri Sainath Stavan Manjari* or A Humble Tribute of Praise to Shri Sainath.[32] The verses read:

> The masjid being your dwelling,
> And your ears not being pierced,
> Noting your offering of '*Fateha*'
> To call you Muslim is logical.
>
> Similarly, considering the worship of fire,
> As done by you, Lord of mercy,
> My own conclusion is
> That you are a Hindu
>
> But these superficial differences
> Would interest only pedagogues;
> But for those devotees desirous of knowledge
> They are of no consequence.[33]

These verses have fomented great debate because Das Ganu, who did such a great deal to promote Sai Baba throughout the Hindu community through his *kirtans*, is here declaring in the opening verse that he was a Muslim. It is noteworthy that there is a divergence of opinion concerning Sai Baba's physical appearance; Das Ganu states that his ears were not pierced; Dabholkar and Sai Sharan Anand thought his ears were pierced, thus 'proving' he was a Hindu. Also Dabholkar says that he was circumcised, which would indicate that he was a Muslim[34], although Sai Sharan Anand thought that he had not undergone circumcision. So one has a choice of whom to believe. Das Ganu states then that his own conclusion (or maybe his own preference) was that the saint was Hindu, but for anyone who wanted to attain

God-realization it really did not matter. Memory here appears to be very selective although Das Ganu appears to have no special motive in pointing out Sai Baba's Muslim characteristics other than stating fact.

Narasimhaswami, Sai Baba's second biographer, only came to hear about Sai Baba in 1933, fifteen years after the saint's physical demise, at a time when the Hindu interpretation of him was already well under way. The biography of Narasimhaswami, the *Apostle of Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi*, highlights the debt the Sai Movement owes to him.[35] In fact it was Narasimhaswami who founded the 'All India Sai Samaj' in Madras, and was responsible for popularizing Sai Baba of Shirdi in South India. Narasimha Iyer, later known as Narasimhaswami, was an orthodox Brahmin, a brilliant student and a successful advocate, who was socially and politically active in the community of Salem in South India where he lived with his wife and two small children. The tragic accidental drowning of both his children in the well of his house caused him to withdraw from worldly life and initiate a quest for a spiritual *guru*. This search took him initially to Tiruvannamalai and the *ashram* of Ramana Maharshi, where he lived for some time and where he also wrote that saint's biography.[36] After a few years, he found the spiritual path of *jnana* advocated by the Maharshi too cold and intellectual for him and he decided to embark upon a pilgrimage to holy places, and visit *bhakti* saints and *sadhus*.

Thus it was after extensive travelling, that he met Hazrat Meher Baba and Upasani Maharaj. At this time in the early 1930s, Upasani Maharaj was held in high esteem as a *guru*, *pandit* and saint in his own right, who knew Sanskrit and all the Hindu religious texts. Even Mahatma Gandhi was said to have consulted the Maharaj in 1927 to obtain his blessing for his mission to uplift the nation. Tens of thousands were said to have been attracted to Sri Upasani Maharaj at that time.[37] Thus Narasimhaswami came to write *Sage of Sakori*, a glowing biography of Sri Upasani Maharaj. Although Sai Baba never appointed Upasani Maharaj to be his successor, intimating rather that he himself would be present from the tomb to help his devotees, many of his devotees nevertheless did accept Upasani Maharaj as Sai Baba's successor, and followed him, and then in turn his successor Godavari Mata. This led to further confusion as to whether Sai Baba was Hindu or Muslim, having a well-known Hindu saint as his apparent successor. By the late 1930's Narasimhaswami was dismayed by a growing notoriety and scandal surrounding Upasani Maharaj and disassociated himself from the *pandit*. One researcher and author, Kevin Shepherd, blames Narasimhaswami for the Hindu gloss he imparted to Sai Baba, and pictures the Swami in an unflattering light.[38] He discovered a diary which shows that Narasimhaswami had also intended to write the biography of Meher Baba, but the latter had flatly refused to cooperate with him. Shepherd intimates that Narasimhaswami's prime motivation was to write biographies of spiritual men in order to raise his own spiritual status. However, the advocate-turned-Swami must be given credit for not wanting to be a burden on any *ashram* in which he stayed, and was willing to earn his keep in a way in which he was eminently qualified. As an advocate he had to sift through facts, discard false evidence and make an assessment of each individual's character, which is all very similar to the process involved in writing a biography. It would appear too facile to accuse Narasimhaswami of trying to gain vicarious fame through mere close association with holy men, as Shepherd suggests, after he had chosen to abandon his own high social position and political status in Salem as well as giving up a highly lucrative legal career for spiritual reasons. Further refutation of Shepherd's contention is provided by Swami Sai Padananda, a disciple of Narasimhaswami and devotee of Sai Baba, who highlights the humility and self-effacing nature of Narasimhaswami in his biography. Noting what a rich spiritual life Narasimhaswami had had, Sai Padananda requested him to write his autobiography. However, he writes, 'to my eternal regret, the Swamiji, who was exceedingly modest about his own achievements, refused to oblige and faded away leaving no record of his spiritual experiences'.[39]

Narasimhaswami left the Sakori ashram in 1933, and continued his search for a *guru*.[40] Although Sri Upasani Maharaj had spoken highly of his own master Sai Baba, Narasimhaswami admits that he was not drawn to enquire further about Sai Baba because he was a Muslim. However, around 1936 he started to meet more devotees of Sai Baba and, hearing their glowing testimony, he came to realize that he was in his words 'the *Kohinoor* among saints'.[41] Through the auspices of Purushottam Avasthi, a retired Brahmin judge, Narasimhaswami was able to interview a great many devotees of Sai Baba, most of whom were the Hindu friends and acquaintances of the judge. The whole of his subsequent Volume II of *Life of Sai Baba* is devoted to the experiences of Sai Baba's close Hindu devotees, Mhalsapati, Nana Chandorkar, Das Ganu, Hari Sitaram Dikshit, G.R.Dabholkar, Upasani Maharaj and G.S.Khaparde, the majority of whom were not only Hindus but also Brahmins. Similarly, most of Volume III records the experiences of lesser known Hindu devotees, with only two chapters devoted to Muslim contacts including Abdul, Sai Baba's long-time devotee and servant. This division reflects the fact that even at this time there were far more Hindu than Muslim followers in Maharashtra [*see* Appendix E for those interviewed by Narasimhaswami in 1936/8]. However, Dabholkar in his Marathi *Sri Sai Saccarita*, gives a detailed description of a *Sufi* named Bade Baba, alias Fakir Baba, alias Peer Mohammad Yasin Miyan, who enjoyed favoured status with Sai Baba. Sai Baba had evidently known this *faqir* much earlier in his life, when they were both in Aurangabad. Bade Baba came to Shirdi in 1909 and stayed at the *chavadi*, and Dabholkar elaborates on how close and dear this *Sufi* was to Sai Baba. He says:

> Great was the importance that this Bade Baba enjoyed. His place was always at Baba's right hand side. Baba would smoke a chillim only after Bade Baba had first smoked it! And so far as Sai Baba was concerned, not a leaf would flutter without Bade Baba. Unless Bade Baba had eaten, Baba would not take his food... Once, it so

> happened, that on the festive occasion of *Diwali* (the Festival of Lights), when all the sweets etc. were served on the plates and the diners had taken their respective places, Bade Baba just walked away in a a huff, offended. Unless Bade Baba was present, Sai Baba would not touch his food and when Sai Baba himself did not touch it, how would the others do so? And so, everybody sat there, waiting. They searched for Bade Baba and brought him back. Only when he thus joined them did Baba eat.[42]

The presence of Bade Baba was palpable in the *ashram* during the years 1909-1918, but as he passed away in 1925, he was never interviewed by Narasimhaswami. Dabholkar however, was present in the *ashram* at the same time and makes frequent reference to this favoured *Sufi*. However, Gunaji only gives him passing reference. Sai Baba had administered to the community of wandering *faqirs* who spoke Marathi or Urdu, but Narasimhaswami did not know either of these languages, so he did not go out and find *faqirs* in Shirdi or its environs in order to interview them about their relationship with Sai Baba. Although Narasimhaswami writes that Sai Baba was 'apparently a Muslim because he lived in the *masjid*,'[43] he admits to knowing little about Sufism, preferring the *bhakti* path of Hinduism and thus wrote about Sai Baba in that vein. He records in his *Life of Sai Baba* which he wrote in English, 'externally the mass of Hindus regarded him as a Muslim but worshipped him as a Hindu God'.[44] While Narasimhaswami was unambiguous in his admission that Sai Baba's ideas were 'in no way distinguishable from Sufism', his Hindu interpretation has nevertheless coloured the work of the subsequent biographers of Sai Baba, for example in his endorsement that Sai Baba 'knew' Sanskrit.[45]

Many Hindu writers today quote Narasimhaswami's statement that Sai Baba knew Sanskrit and was familiar with the *Bhagavad Gita*, and in defence of this assertion, cite a well-documented incident which occurred one day when Nana Chandorkar was massaging the saint's legs. It is recorded twice, first in the *Sri Sai Satcharita*[46] and second, the story was later recalled by Mr. B.V. Deo, a retired Mamlatdar, of Station Road, Thana, when questioned on September 27, 1936 by Narasimhaswami. This interview was subsequently published in *Devotees' Experiences of Shri Sai Baba*.[47] Nana Chandorkar was quietly chanting to himself a verse from the *Bhagavad-Gita* when Sai Baba asked him to repeat it. Now it was assumed by everyone that Sai Baba was illiterate, and as a Muslim would have no knowledge of Sanskrit, but if he 'knew' the *Bhagavad Gita* then perforce he must be a Hindu dressed in Muslim garb. Nana repeated the *sloka*:

> Tad viddhi pranipatena pariprasnena sevaya
> Upadeksyanti te jnanam jnaninas tattwa darsinah
>
> This know! Through humble submission, through enquiry, through service (on thine own part), the knowing ones, the perceivers of Truth, will be led to teach thee knowledge.[48]
>
> *Bhagavad-Gita IV:3*

This verse pertains to how a disciple should approach a *guru* to attain God-realization - a subject very close to Sai Baba's heart, representing the very goal of a *Sufi* mystic, and he quickly grasped the opportunity to expound upon it. The subsequent conversation between Sai Baba and his Brahmin devotee was recorded verbatim [*see* Appendix F]. Sai Baba first asked Nana Chandorkar to read the verse aloud slowly, then secondly to give his own interpetation and meaning, and thirdly to give the strict grammatical meaning of each word with case, mood and tense. Thus, at this point, Sai Baba had all the raw material of the verse given to him, so there is no basis to the supposition that he in fact 'knew' Sanskrit or even the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Sai Baba did not need to know the text, for by hearing the essential import he knew what the text was trying to convey from his own deep experience. He then proceeded to give a unique interpretation of the verse, totally different from the accepted *Advaita Bhasya* by Sankaracarya, or indeed any other Hindu commentator.

Traditionally the second part of the verse, how *jnana upadesh* (the imparting of realisation) is to be effected, is thought to be relatively simple - that the enlightened ones, i.e. the perceivers of Truth, will teach you. In Sanskrit the line '*upadeksyanti te jnanam*' can grammatically also read '*upadeksyanti te ajnanam*', which would mean that the enlightened ones would teach you not wisdom but ignorance. To the Hindu this would be nonsense, and Sankara, whose *Bhasya* or Commentary is considered to be authoritative, never interpreted it in this way. But Sai Baba proceeded to give a very *Sufistic* interpretation for in *Sufi* thought, ignorance is equated with veils, which cover one's true self as a light is hidden by many shades which have to be torn away or removed to reveal the innate light of perfection. Sai Baba's conversation was recorded verbatim in a number of places, all similar. An extract from the dialogue recorded in *Sri Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings* is given below.[49]

Sai Baba: Isn't Brahman *jnana* (divine knowledge) or Sadvastu (being)?

N.C.: Yes.

Sai Baba: And everything else *asat* (non-being) or *ajnana* (ignorance or non-knowledge)?

N.C.: Yes.

Sai Baba: Do not the scriptures declare that Brahman is beyond the range of speech and mind?

N.C.: Yes.

Sai Baba: Then the speech of the *Guru* is not Brahman or *jnana*?

N.C.: No.

Sai Baba: Then you admit that what the *Guru* says is not *jnana* (knowledge) but *ajnana* (ignorance)?

N.C.: It seems so.

Sai Baba: Then the *Guru's* instruction is simply a piece of ignorance used to remove the disciple's ignorance, just as we use a thorn to remove another thorn from the foot, isn't it?

N.C.: I suppose so.

Sai Baba: The disciple is just a *jiva* (being) whose essential nature is *jnana* (knowledge), isn't he?

N.C.: Yes.

Sai Baba: Then there is no necessity to give him *jnana* (knowledge) but simply to remove the veil of ignorance that hides the pre-existent *jnana*.....just as moss or water plants cover over the surface of a pond. Clear away the plants and you have the clear water. You do not have to create water; water is already there. During an eclipse the sun or moon is there, but *rahu* or *kethu* hides the view from us, and when *rahu* or *kethu* passes away, the light of the sun or moon which is continuing right through, is seen by us. Or take another example - a cataract grows on the eye and prevents a man from seeing; remove the cataract and he sees. *Ajnana* (ignorance) is the cataract. The Universe is the efflorescence of the indescribable *maya*, which is ignorance. Yet it is this *ajnana* that illumines the *ajnana*... *Jnana* - Divine Knowledge is to be realised, not taught.

There is a *Sufi* notion that every soul before birth passes through seventy thousand veils which separate him from *Allah*, the One Reality, before he enters the world of matter and sense objects, according to his own merit. The passage through the veils brings forgetfulness of one's true divine source. A modern dervish describes the human condition, 'He is now, as it were, in prison in his body, separated by these thick curtains from *Allah*.'[50] The goal of Sufism and the role of the *Sufi* Master therefore is to help the aspirant escape from this prison and recover his original unity with God while still in the body. Sai Baba's unique interpretation of the *Bhagavad-Gita* verse was thus very much in line with *Sufi* understanding, that removing layers or veils of ignorance, was the task of the Master to reveal what was inherently there all along, rather than teach wisdom. Thus we see that the conclusion of the biographers that Sai Baba must be Hindu, or that he knew the *Bhagavad-Gita* or even Sanskrit from his exposition of this verse is not, in fact, supported by this incident.

We have shown that Sai Baba's life can be divided into two main periods so far as his sectarian standing is concerned - the period prior to 1910, and the eight-year period between 1910 and 1918. Before 1910, Sai Baba was generally accepted as a Muslim *Sufi*, after which his apparent Muslim status became blurred due to the influx of the Bombay Hindus. Sai Baba's visitors for the major portion of his life were itinerant *Sufi faqirs*, who, true to their renunciate goal, shunned any worldly contact and in general were neither vocal nor literate. However, the majority of the visitors during the eight year period after 1910 were generally householders and Hindus who were both literate and vocal. It is this latter group of people and their families who were known to Dabholkar and interviewed for his book. It was these very same people who were subsequently re-interviewed, often more than twenty years later in 1936 by Narasimhaswami, and it is these interviews which constitute the raw material for his biography, *Life of Sai Baba.* He subsequently published these interviews as a three-part book entitled *Devotees' Experiences of Shri Sai Baba.* The majority of those interviewed were professional. All but three came after 1900, with the majority coming after 1910. Of the 79 devotees interviewed by Narasimhaswami, the religion is recorded in the case of 51 only. Of those 51, 43 are Hindu including 26 Brahmins, 4 are Muslim, 2 are Christian and 2 are Parsi [*see* Appendix E]. Because of the influx of Hindus, the reports of Sai Baba's last few years became heavily biased in favour of the Hindu perception and interpretation of the saint.

As the biographies are all written by Hindus, any *Sufi* or Muslim references surrounding the life and history of Sai Baba are usually oblique and subtle. Even the recent movies follow the standard biographies quite closely, thereby imparting a distinct Hindu gloss to the life of Sai Baba. However, the *Sufi* references can be extracted from the biographies and their implications examined. It has been demonstrated throughout this book that there has been a Hindu bias in the story of Sai Baba's life and teaching, starting while he was still alive, and which has accelerated to the point today where he is totally revered and worshipped at his shrine as a deity in the traditional Hindu manner with *puja* including *abhisekam* and *arati*. A whole new genre of *bhakti* (Hindu) devotional literature has emerged on behalf of Sai Baba, such as the works by the *kirtankar,* Krishnarao Jageshwar Bhishma. He composed a number of Marathi *bhajans*, prayers, songs called *abhangas*, and *aratis* or hymns of praise for the ritual worship of Sai Baba. Being a devotee of Vitthala at Pandharpur, he modelled his *aratis* on those sung in Pandharpur throughout the day: morning or *kakad arati;* noon *arati*; evening *arati* and bedtime *arati*.[51] He also wrote a *Mahima Stotram* or Hymn of Glory to Shri Sainath.[52] All these are traditional Hindu offerings. Today, many of these compositions are used daily in the Sai Baba *Samadhi Mandir* at Shirdi. Sai Baba himself, according to his Hindu biographers, tolerated this Hindu demonstration of devotion in his final few years, although it is evident from the literature that for most of the saint's life he rejected any kind of personal cult. He lived his whole life as a *Sufi* renunciate, begging for his food, mending his own clothes and living very simply in his rustic *masjid*.

Historically, the spiritual heritage of Maharashtra had bred an attitude of syncretism and tolerance and respect for both the *Sufi* and *bhakti* paths and their protagonists. It is not unusual in the history of pre-colonial Maharashtra, although it may be elsewhere in India, to find Muslim *pirs* or *Sufi* divines with Hindu *murids*, and Hindu *gurus* with Muslim students (*sisyas*). Dabholkar mentions a Muslim *pir* living in Bandra, a suburb of Bombay very close to where he personally lived. He comments that this famous Muslim saint named Pir Moulana had many Hindu, Parsi and other devotees who followed different religions, who used to go and see him and take his *darshan*.[53] Sai Baba of Shirdi is a product of this tradition and can be seen as the very embodiment of this symbiotic aspect of Maharashtra *dharma* or the tradition of Maharashtra. Sai Baba's mission was to reinforce the *Sufi* love of God, which is similar to the intense devotion towards God advocated by the *bhakti* tradition, and to emphasize the essential oneness of all paths towards the goal of God-realization.

As a result of the recent explosion of interest and devotion expressed towards Sai Baba of Shirdi, local devotees in both Pathri, Sai Baba's birthplace, and Dhoopkeda, the village where Sai Baba first met Chand Patil, each want to build a Sai Baba *mandir* to commemorate his association with these places. Today these are mainly Hindu followers, and initially they set up small altars with pictures of Sai Baba. I had the privilege of being shown the makeshift altar in a hut on the piece of land in Pathri designated for the building of a *mandir*. Mr. and Mrs. V.B. Kher visited Pathri in 1975 and speaking to Shri Dinkarrao Chaudhari, a leading citizen, who incidentally was also a gracious host to me on my visit there in 1990, found out that his late father Vasudeorao Chaudhari had identified this piece of land as the home of the Bhusari family, whom he declared were ancestors of Sai Baba. The Khers, relying on the testimony of Swami Sai Sharan Anand that Sai Baba came from a *Yajurvedi Deshastha* Brahmin family, verified that the Bhusari family was the only such family in Pathri at the time, and thus voiced the possibility that Sai Baba was from this family.[54] Unfortunately from this distance in time, this information cannot be independently verified. However, the Bhusari land was purchased and there are plans for a *mandir* to be built in the near future honouring the memory of Sai Baba. Similarly, in 1990, after an unusual journey to the remote village of Dhoopkeda, over more than three kilometers of rough path from the paved road and having to ford the river on foot, I saw the flag pole indicating the open area of the *maidan* where Sai Baba is said to have sat and smoked the *chilim* under a tree and met Chand Patil. It seemed that all the men of the village came out to welcome us. After Mr. Kher's visit in the 1980's, the local people set up a *zopadi* or small hut with an altar, with a *shivalingam* and statue of Sai Baba. They had ceremonially dedicated a memorial plaque and foundation stone at this place on November 17, 1990, only a month prior to my visit there, and they intend to build a proper memorial on the site in the future. Today Muslims and *Sufis* are very few in these places, so it is the Hindus who naturally want to honour Sai Baba, and do so in their own traditional way.

Here in Canada I have recently received an invitation to the installation of a *chhatra*, an ornamental canopy or umbrella over the *murti* of Sai Baba of Shirdi at the Vishnu Temple in Toronto. Since such an installation could never occur in the honouring of a Muslim *pir*, it seems that the re-interpretation continues to this day.

In the next chapter it will be shown how the devotees of Sri Sathya Sai Baba from all faiths have embraced Shirdi Sai Baba, and thus tend to re-interpret him in a new way.

NOTES

1. Quoted in the *Globe and Mail*, Toronto, Sept 18, 1997, from the *The Sunday Telegraph*.
2. Bruce Lawrence, 'The Early Chishti Approach to Sama' in *Islamic Society and Culture: Essays in Honour of Aziz Ahmad*, ed. Milton Israel and N.K. Wagle (New Delhi: Manohar, 1983), pp. 69-93. Also 'Early Indo-Muslim Saints and Conversion', in *Islam and Asia, Vol I, South Asia,* ed. Yohanan Friedmann (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), pp. 109-145.
3. Richard Eaton, *The Sufis of Bijapur 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).
4. Carl Ernst, *The Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Centre* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).
5. Ernst, *The Eternal Garden*, pp. 34-37.
6. DE, p. 62.
7. DE, p. 63.
8. LSB, II:43.
9. DE, p. 279.
10. DE, p. 280.
11. SSG, p. 123.
12. SSG. p. 28.
13. LSB, III:164.
14. DE, p. 145.
15. CS, No. 222.
16. This story is retold in CS, No. 223.
17. An elaborate version of the story is given in SSG, pp. 68-70.
18. DE, p. 283.
19. DE, 108-109.
20. LSB, II:2.

21. *Arati* with an accompanying song was in later decades performed to Sai Baba's disciple, Sri Upasani Maharaj and subsequently to his successor, Shri Godavari Mata. B.V. Narasimhaswami and S. Subbarao, *Sage of Sakuri: Life Story of Shree Upasani Maharaj* (1938; Madras: Sunday Times Press; Sakuri: Shri Upasani Kanya Kumari Sthan, 1985), p. 169.
22. Personal communication with Abdul's grandson, Rahim Khan, in Shirdi.
23. A notebook kept by Abdul, shows that Sai Baba had a good working knowledge of Islam and Sufism. A translation of Abdul's notebook cited as *Saibaba MS*, is given in Part II.
24. SSG, chapters 40-41.
25. SSG, p. 3.
26. SS, 11: 84.
27. SS, 11:50-84. This story without the Muslim reference is found in SSG, p. 64.
28. SS, 8:1.
29. SS, 38:116-23.
30. SSG, p. 204. This interpretation is not in *Sri Sai Saccarita*.
31. DE, p. 204.
32. Comprising 164 verses it follows the traditional obeisance to Ganesa, followed by tributes to most of the gods of the Hindu pantheon.
33. Das Ganu, *Stavan Manjari*, trans. Zarine Taraporevala, vs. 67-69.
34. SS, 7:13
35. Sai Padananda, *Sri Narasimha Swamiji: Apostle of Sri Sai Baba, the Saint of Shirdi*. Madras: All India Sai Samaj (Regd.), 1973
36. B.V. Narasimhaswami, *Self-Realization or The Life and Teachings of Bhagawan Sri Ramana Maharshi*.
37. LSB, III:228.
38. Kevin R.D. Shepherd, *Gurus Rediscovered: Biographies of Sai Baba of Shirdi and Upasani Maharaj of Sakori* (Cambridge: Anthropographia Publications, 1985).
39. Shepherd, *Gurus Rediscovered*, and Sai Padananda, *Sri Narasimha Swamiji*, p. x.
40. Shepherd snidely suggests here that due to his disappointment with Upasani Maharaj the next biography Narasimhaswami attempted was conveniently that of a saint who had passed away some 15 years earlier, and who would not therefore spring any unpleasant surprises. Shepherd, *Gurus Rediscovered*, p. 3.
41. The *Kohinoor* was the largest and most brilliant diamond ever found.
42. *Sri Sai Satcharit*, English translation by Prof. Indira Kher, 23:112-116. Forthcoming publication.
43. DE, p. 45.
44. LSB, III:157.
45. LSB, III:152.
46. SSG, p. 207.

47. DE, p. 239.
48. SSG, 39:30-112 (philosophical explanation); 50:40-160 (detailed word-by-word analysis).
49. CS, pp. 67-69.
50. W.H.T. Gairdner, *"The Way" of a Mohammedan Mystic*. (Leipzig: 1912, pp. 9f.)
51. LSB, I:37
52. All these compositions by Krishnarao Jageshwar Bhishma are collected under the title *Shri Sadguru Sainath Sagunopasana* (Worship of the Manifested Shri Sadguru Sainath). Trans. Zarine Taraporevala (Bombay: Sai Dhun Enterprises, 1990). I am indebted to Mrs. Taraporevala for a copy of this booklet.
53. SSG, p. 110.
54. V.B. Kher, 'A Search for the Birth Place of Shri Sai Baba', reprint from *Shri Sai Leela*, October 1989.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Sathya Sai Baba Connection

Today, a significant factor impelling a renewed interest in Sai Baba of Shirdi is the claim by the contemporary spiritual Master and Godman, Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, that he is the reincarnation of the earlier saint. Sai Baba of Shirdi did not designate a spiritual successor to continue his message, declaring that after his physical death he would still be present, saying: "I shall be ever active and vigorous even after leaving this earthly body"[1]. He further announced that he would return in eight years, reincarnating in a new body. Hari Sitaram Dikshit recalled that Shirdi Sai Baba told him that he would return as an eight-year-old boy, but Sathya Sai Baba says he misheard what was said. What was actually said was that he would return in eight years. Sathya Sai Baba was born in 1926, eight years after the passing of Shirdi Sai Baba in 1918. Howard Murphet in his book *Beyond Death The Undiscover'd Country* says that he once asked Sathya Sai Baba where he had been and what he had been doing in the eight years between casting off his body at Shirdi and putting on a new one in Puttaparthi in 1926. Baba replied, "I was here near the earth, doing what I am doing now, helping people."[2] On May 23, 1940 at age 14, Sathya Sai Baba suddenly threw away his school books and announced to family and friends that he was Sai Baba, but his father Venkappa Raju requested some proof. Picking up a handful of jasmine flowers, the boy scattered them casually on the floor, whence they formed the Telugu characters for 'Sai Baba', evoking a joyous outburst of devotion from all present.[3] Thus he began his spiritual mission in the world, saying "I am Sai Baba...I do not belong to you...my devotees are calling me. I have my work." Since that momentous time Sri Sathya Sai Baba has made repeated reference to Sai Baba of Shirdi as 'his previous body'. As a youth Sathya Sai Baba materialized a small *murti* of Shirdi Sai Baba (*see* Plate 33). In the early 1940's, no one at Puttaparthi in rural Andhra Pradesh, the birthplace of Sathyanarayana Raju (later to be known as Sathya Sai Baba), had ever heard of the Muslim saint, Sai Baba of Shirdi from Maharashtra, who had passed away more than two decades before in 1918.

Over the years, with Sathya Sai Baba's increasing fame, numerous individuals who had personally met and known Shirdi Sai Baba when he was alive, heard of Sathya Sai Baba and went to visit him, and they subsequently related how they personally became convinced of the truth that the one was the reincarnation of the other. The story is told by Shri M.S. Dixit, the nephew of Shirdi Sai Baba's long-time devotee Hari Sitaram Dixit, that he went to Puttaparthi to see Sathya Sai Baba in a rather negative frame of mind as Sathya Sai Baba's appearance and mannerisms seemed flamboyant compared to the humble simplicity of the Shirdi sage, whom he had met when quite young. However, Sathya Sai gave him many proofs that he was the same entity reincarnated. Sathya Sai related numerous incidents and the experiences he had had as Shirdi Sai with his uncle, and readily pointed out his uncle in a photograph.[4]

Another such devotee of Shirdi Sai Baba was Sarada Devi, also known as Pedda Bottu (as she used to wear a very large red dot on her forehead). She recalls in her autobiography written in Telugu, that she was just a young woman when she went to visit the Shirdi sage towards the end of his life, and at that time he promised her that he would see her again in his next life. Years later she met Sathya Sai Baba at Uravakonda, and finally in 1943 went to Puttaparthi where Sathya Sai Baba reminded her of his previous identity as Shirdi Baba, and invited her to come and live in Prasanthi Nilayam. In 1958 she accepted his invitation and went to live there where she was known among the residents as Shirdi Ma. The author had the privilege of seeing her in Prasanthi Nilayam when she was very old and in a wheel-chair, before she died a few years ago.

Whilst the belief in reincarnation is not universal, the concept is ancient predating most organised religion, and is widely accepted in the east especially by the Hindu and Buddhist world, although it is not part of fundamentalist Islamic teaching. So convinced are the Tibetan Buddhists of rebirth that they go in search of the reincarnation of their spiritual leader the Dalai Lama, a few years after his decease. As already indicated, Shirdi Sai Baba was not an orthodox Muslim and held some views and teachings considered to be heterodox by orthodox Muslims. Within Sufism there is a heterodox theory of incarnation called *hulul* which includes the transmigration of spirits known as *naskh-i arwah*.[5] The history of Sufism contains numerous references to a school or *silsila* of *Hululiyya* founded by Shaykh Abu Hulman of Damascus.[6] But in general Sufism has rejected *hulul*, which in addition to meaning 'Incarnation of the Divine in Man', also has the connotation of God's indwelling and its associated notions of metempsychosis or *tanasukhiyan*. Yet all these words and concepts exist in the *Sufi* vocabulary, and have formed an on-going debate in *Sufi* circles. It was the experience of mystics that when an adept was the recipient of the effulgence of the Absolute Being, and when the feeling of separateness from God was extinguished, that God would then 'set up' in the temple of the human body, but 'without permeation from His essence.'[7] These advanced mystic experiences were often kept secret, for while *Sufis* in general developed their mystical systems within the spirit of Islam and the *shari'at*, their actual experiences gained on the path to God often brought them into conflict with the Islamic law.

Sai Baba was a mystic and had no external connection with orthodox Islam or the Muslim *shari'at*. Having attained the goal of God-realization through the *Sufi* path, his belief in incarnation, transmigration of the soul and reincarnation stemmed from his own experience and intuition. He often spoke of the 'many *janmas*' (lifetimes) during which he had known a visitor or devotee.[8] He understood the Hindu notion of birth, death and rebirth, termed *samsara* for those who had not reached God-realization. He said:

> When thus the unruly mind does not merge in God (Brahman or *Allah*) *samsara* or rebirth is inevitable. Till the mind is conquered, one is reborn. But among births, human birth is most precious.[9]

Narke remembers that Sai Baba several times made reference to his cosmic role where he had 'control of destinies of departed souls.'[10] He not only believed in transmigration of human souls but entertained the possibility of the transmigration of animals' souls. Debts incurred in previous lives by animals also had to be repaid.[11] He said: "No one comes to us without *rinanubanda* or some pre-natal connection. So when any dog, cat, pig, fly or person approaches, do not drive him or it away."[12] Furthermore he believed that people can be reborn as animals, and he tells a long story about two adversaries who were reborn as a snake and a frog, and his own role in saving the frog from the snake, saying: "God has saved his devotee Basappa [the frog] by sending me [to intervene]."[13] Thus, although the term *hulul* is never mentioned by Sai Baba's Hindu biographers or devotees, he had accepted the notion of rebirth, and he incorporated this notion within his teachings.

It should be noted that Sai Baba of Shirdi was recognised as an *avatar* or Incarnation of God, during his own lifetime by his close Hindu devotees. Thus, this designation cannot be said to be a later accretion added by ardent devotees wishing to elevate the status of their master long after his demise. Today, Sathya Sai Baba is also being recognised more and more as an *avatar* of the divine Godhead by millions of his devotees. In addition to his reincarnatory claims vis-a-vis Shirdi Sai Baba, he has made further incarnatory claims when he declared on *Gurupoornima* day, July 6, 1963, that he himself was the incarnation of the Indian deity, Shiva.[14] According to Hindu mythology, Shiva does not usually incarnate and take a normal human birth in the same way as Vishnu who is associated with cosmic stability, but rather he is said to make temporary appearances called *pradhurbhavas*. However, the extraordinary times of this *Kaliyuga*, the age of darkness, call for unusual divine responses, and Shiva is the Hindu god associated with cosmic change.[15] In fact, Sathya Sai Baba has declared that his own appearance as an *avatar* is part of a triple *avatar* of Shiva and Shakti which will span around 250 years, and which will usher in a new Golden Age. Shirdi Sai Baba was the first part of this triple descent; Sathya Sai Baba is the second; while the third will be born in the future and will be called Prema Sai Baba. Sathya Sai Baba has declared that he will live until age ninety-six, until 2022 and after eight years, in 2030, Prema Sai will be born in Gunaparthi, a village in the Mandya district of Karnataka State near Mysore.[16] According to Sathya Sai Baba, righteousness in the world today is so low that it will require a triple *avatar* spanning a quarter of a millenium to restore *dharma* and this will be the combined lifetime of Shirdi Sai Baba, Sathya Sai Baba and the future Prema Sai Baba.

The life-story of Sri Sathya Sai Baba is inextricably linked with that of Sri Sai Baba of Shirdi, and frequent and numerous references to the earlier saint have peppered his discourses for more than 50 years. For devotees of Sathya Sai Baba these allusions to the nineteenth-century Maharashtrian saint have also come to form an integral part of the hagiography of Shirdi Sai Baba, as well as his own biography. In the early years the silver statue of Shirdi Sai Baba would be brought out at the festival of *Mahashivaratri* and a large urn-like vessel was held upturned over it; Sathya Sai Baba would then put his hand inside the empty vessel, and while ever his hand was there large quantities of *vibhuti* (holy ash) would miraculously descend onto the statue as an *abhishekam* or ritual bath in quantities far exceeding the capacity of the vessel. Sathya Sai Baba continued this every year for many years but stopped the ceremony some years ago. It is interesting to note that holy ash called *udi* was an integral part of Shirdi Sai Baba's blessing, and was found to have great curative power when given by him. Similarly, holy ash called *vibhuti* is given as a curative or blessing by Sathya Sai Baba.

One reference is also of particular interest, namely Sathya Sai's assertion that he took birth at Puttaparthi because of the prayers of an aged sage named Venka Avadhoota who was known and revered by the older members of the Raju family. The coincidence of the name 'Venka' is suggestive, as will be shown, of a link between the two Sais. Rumours concerning the early *guru* of Shirdi Sai Baba centre around an enigmatic figure known merely as 'Venkusha' or as we suggest earlier 'Venku Shah', about whom very little is known. Elsewhere we have shown that, although there is a persistent hagiography identifying Venkusha with Gopal Rao Deshmukh of Selu, a story which is often quoted at length in the secondary books, simple research shows that this story is totally unfounded. The *shaka* dates conclusively show that the Deshmukh must have passed away decades before Shirdi Sai Baba was born. In a discourse given by Sathya Sai Baba in September 1990, he says that at age four Shirdi Sai was taken by the *fakir*'s wife to 'a high-souled pious scholar named Venkusa [*sic*]' with whom he stayed in his ashram for 12 years, but very little other factual information is given.[17]

Featuring in the family history and birth story of Sathyanarayana Raju (now known as Sri Sathya Sai Baba), is a sage called Venka Avadhoota. This itinerant sage was so revered by Sathya's grandfather, Sri Kondama Raju, that he named his two sons 'Venka' after him, Pedda Venkappa Raju and Chinna Venkappa Raju. Pedda Venkappa Raju was to become the father of Sathyanarayana Raju. Kasturi, Sri Sathya Sai Baba's biographer, inquiring from Kondama Raju about the origins of this saintly figure, was told "No one knew where he came from or where indeed he went. He was here there, anywhere, everywhere, for more years than anyone knew or could guess".[18] On the occasion when the fourteen-year old Sathyanarayana Raju announced to the world that he had a spiritual mission, his father was furious and demanded to know who he was. He then replied to the delight of his grandfather, "Your Venka Avadhoota prayed that I take birth in your home, and I have come".[19]

There is the tradition in India that an *avatar* or incarnation of God, comes in response to prayers of saints and sages in order to save mankind, to preserve *dharma* and to rescue the world when it is in danger. Venka Avadhoota evidently had prayed thus, and one afternoon, while they were sitting under a banyan tree, confided to Kondama Raju, that "*Bhoodevi* (the earth goddess) weeps. So Narayana comes. You can see him". After delivering this extraordinary prediction, the Avadhoota exacted an assurance from Kondama that he believed his amazing words, that Lord Narayana himself would be born on earth and Kondama would see him. Kasturi comments that in retrospect, although the sage Venka Avadhoota himself would not live to see Sathyanarayana born on earth, it is evident that he was forewarning Kondama that the Lord Himself would take birth in his family. Kondama, nevertheless, never seriously dreamt that such a thing would really occur![20]

Venka Avadhoota is buried at Hussainpura in the Pavagada Taluk of Karnataka, and local people there maintained at the time that Venka Avadhoota could be identified with the 'Venkusha' to whom Shirdi Sai was entrusted as a very young boy. The dates of the sage Venka Avadhoota being one and the same as the *guru* 'Venkusha' could fit. If Sai Baba of Shirdi was born in 1838, he would be 62 at the turn of the century. We can assume that Venkusha would be older than Sai Baba by at least twenty years if he was his *guru*, so we can arbitarily assign to him an age between 82-100 in 1900 if he was still living. Venka Avadhoota was not alive at Sathyanarayana's birth in 1926, but his father, Pedda Venkappa Raju, was named after the sage at his birth around 1900. At this date the sage was known and highly revered by the Raju family and remembered by the grandfather Kondama Raju, whom Kasturi had occasion to interview in 1948. Kondama Raju himself lived to be a great age. By 1900, therefore, we can assume Venka Avadhoota was quite old as he was an established sage when Kondama Raju felt privileged to feed him and listen to 'his maxims on Man, Nature and God'.[21] The saintliness of Venka Avadhoota is described by Kondama Raju thus:

> No face could ever be gloomy in his presence for he was always jovial. No door was ever closed as he passed by; everyone invited him in. He was claimed as kinsman by people everywhere, though he himself refused to accept

> such a relationship or such ties with anyone...When he laid his hand on the head of some one, that touch was a prelude to Paradise. He was a breeze, a cloud, a bird on flight from earth to heaven.[22]

Traditionally the Sanskrit term *avadhuta* is yet one more term for an ascetic, refining the meaning to specify one who has renounced all worldly attachments and connections.[23] According to Briggs, the Nath Yogis define an *avadhuta* as one who has achieved liberation, and the term is used generally for non-Brahmin ascetics who are free from all worldly ties, particularly those of caste, and who practice *yoga* and *bhakti*.[24] In his *Geeta Vahini*, Sathya Sai Baba defines the behaviour of an *avadhuta*, stressing his unattached nature:

> They are not worried in the least. They have no relation with others. They pay no heed to past present or future. They move about on thorn and stone, silent, smiling to themselves, ever joyous, ever alert, seeking no comfort and no shelter, seeking no place to sleep or to take food, for *ananda* is their *ahara*.[25]

Kondama Raju in his conversations with Kasturi referred to Venka Avadhoota as the 'Alone', and 'the Idol of total Bliss' which perhaps captures the essence of all these definitions. Kasturi defines *avadhuta* as an 'anchorite' - one who has pulverised the links that bind him to the alluring world of appearance.[26] These definitions are identical to that of a *Sufi faqir*.

Kasturi once made a visit to the tomb of Venka Avadhoota, for he records that the sage is buried at Hussinpura, Pavagada Taluk of the state of Karnataka, a few miles from the Andhra Pradesh border. When interviewing the people there, he records that they said that their grandparents believed that the Avadhoota had come from Maharashtra, and some insisted that he was the same sage as the Venkusha, under whose wing Sai Baba of Shirdi spent his childhood. A few assumptions have to be made to clarify this story. During the 1830's the scholar Venkusha may have had a small school for young boys, and it was common in those days for students to live in the house of their *guru*. Sathya Sai says that Shirdi Sai did not stay long with Venkusha, but even if he left at age 16 in 1854 after a 12-year association as is generally postulated, the pious scholar Venka could have decided to renounce worldly associations and commitments in order to follow a wandering lifestyle, and subsequently become known as Venka Avadhoota.

As Sri Sathya Sai Baba today has foretold the precise date and place of his third Sai incarnation as Prema Sai Baba, as part of the triple Sai *avatar*, then it is not unreasonable that this advance information would be known to one close to Shirdi Sai such as his former *guru*-turned-*avadhoota*. We hear no more about Venkusha after Sai Baba left, for by the very nature of *avadhuta*, human ties are broken - the world and its connections are renounced. How natural though for the *guru*, if knowing the family and place pre-destined for the second Sai incarnation, to go and talk to the Raju family, specifically Kondama Raju, and drop a hint of the great event, the birth of the next Sai incarnation into their family, in the future.

Sathya Sai Baba has not been too forthcoming on the subject of Venkusha, saying only that he was ‘a pious scholar’. The identity of Venkusha has proved to be problematic to a number of researchers, including G.V. Gokak, an eminent scientist who became the first Vice-Chancellor of the University at Puttaparthi. He admitted that he was confused by Sathya Sai Baba’s silence on the topic of Shirdi Sai Baba’s *guru* and resolved to ask him. One year, after the Summer Course given by Sathya Sai Baba in Whitefield, Bangalore, he invited questions, so Gokak grasped the opportunity to ask him about Venkusha. Swami then told the story of the birth of Shirdi Sai in detail, and promised to tell more the following day.[27] However, the next day he had decided it was not good to talk about himself, so the topic of Venkusha was not resolved on this occasion either. One of the stations on the *Sufi* path is *sabr*, meaning patience, the conviction that God alone knows the correct time for any action. We may surmise that the reason for Sri Sathya Sai Baba’s silence on the topic of Venkusha has been that, up until now or sometime in the near future, it has not been important whether Venkusha or his *guru* was Muslim or Hindu. However, Sathya Sai has stated that the Muslims would be the last to come to him, and they would not recognize him until eight years before his passing (2014 AD). Could it be that highlighting the *Sufi*-Muslim aspects of Shirdi Sai Baba will be important in the future in helping Muslims recognize the significance·of the Sai triple avatar?

It is impossible to study Sai Baba of Shirdi without factoring in the enormous influence of the reincarnatory claim by Sathya Sai Baba, although as stated earlier, it would be another book in itself to include all that this Swami has said about the earlierGodman. But suffice it to say that, like the Shirdi sage, Sathya Sai Baba propounds the universal message of the love of God, which is at the core of both Sufism and *Bhakti* Hinduism and the essence of all religions. However, many people find it hard to relate the two, the one a plain simple ascetic while the other is more like a flashy pop star in appearance. Sathya Sai Baba explains it using a simple parable. He takes the idea of candy, saying that the basic recipe of sweets is white sugar and flour which can be formed into white flat squares, which he uses as a symbol for Shirdi Sai Baba in his plain white garb. The same mixture can have bright colour added and then rolled into balls, this time symbolic of Sathya Sai Baba with his bright orange robe and 'afro' hairstyle. The candy may look vastly different but the ingredients and taste areessentially the same. Thus he demonstrates that the identity of the two Sais is the same, although appearing totally dissimilar. Outwardly, while Sathya Sai Baba's ashram and *mandir* have an overall Hindu orientation, he stresses that the essential core of all religions is the same. The major Hindu festivals are celebrated along with Christmas, Chinese New Year and festivals significant to other traditions.

In the *mandir* at Prasanthi Nilayam, a life-size painting of Sai Baba of Shirdi stands on the left of the altar balancing a life-size photograph of Sathya Sai Baba on the right. Shirdi Sai Baba is given equal prominence to the current Godman. Garlands are placed daily on the lifesize marble *murti* of Shirdi Sai Baba which now sits on a similar silver throne to the one in Shirdi, and is placed to the left of the altar, balancing the chair reserved for Sathya Sai Baba on the right (*see* Plate 1). Elsewhere he has also posed with a large silver *murti* of Sai Baba of Shirdi whom he refers to as his previous body (*see* Plate 34). Until recently there has been little information available about the Maharashtrian saint in the Puttaparthi ashram, but books are now beginning to be made available. Desiring to know more about the former incarnation of Sathya Sai Baba, many devotees now make the trip to Shirdi to pay homage at the *Samadhi Mandir*. The recent popularity of Sathya Sai Baba's *padukas* and the celebration of *Paduka Puja* in Prasanthi Nilayam, can easily be traced back to the traditional *paduka* pilgrimage of the *Varkaris* to Pandharpur in Maharashtra. This old custom was revived by devotees of Shirdi Sai Baba when they had *padukas* made and installed under the *neem* tree, before the saint pased away.

'*Sathyam, Sivam, Sundaram*', the biography of Sathya Sai Baba by N. Kasturi, contains numerous references to Shirdi Sai Baba, made by Sathya Sai Baba from the very earliest years after he declared his mission in 1940.[28] Officially the *Sansthan* in Shirdi (and some Shirdi Sai devotees) have not accepted the authenticity of Sathya Sai Baba as a reincarnation of Shirdi Sai Baba. A number of Shirdi Sai devotees are in fact still quite antagonistic to Sathya Sai Baba, although many books are now appearing written by long-time Shirdi Sai devotees, outlining how Sathya Sai Baba has personally convinced them of his reincarnated identity. Examples are Dr. R.T. Kakade and Dr. A. Veerabhadra Rao, who wrote the book *Shirdi to Puttaparthi*, which recounts their long-standing allegiance to Shirdi Sai Baba, their initial doubts about the claim of Sathya Sai Baba, and how they were convinced by Sathya Sai Baba and their subsequent endorsement of him.[29] Today it seems that the Shri Sai Baba *Sansthan* in Shirdi is softening its attitude due to the fact that so many thousands of devotees of Sathya Sai Baba are now visiting the *Samadhi Mandir* and shrine in Shirdi.

Sathya Sai Baba told the following story one day to illustrate Shirdi Sai Baba's view that the essence of Hinduism and Islam are essentially the same. Some jealous Muslims resented Hindus worshipping Shirdi Sai Baba, especially when they performed rituals, *pujas*, or made offerings. Mhalsapati, the saint's long-time Hindu devotee, had became the object of their hatred as he was very close to Sai Baba, and was also the priest of the local Khandoba Temple. Those Muslims were particularly incensed by the fact that Mhalsapati was allowed to apply sandal paste to Sai Baba's forehead, as this was against Muslim orthodoxy, and was a typical Hindu custom performed to deities in the temples. As a warning to discourage this Hindu practice and in order to lay claim to the saint as their own, those Muslims attacked Mhalsapati and beat him viciously. With every stroke he cried, 'Baba!' 'Baba!' Sai Baba came out and roared, 'Shaitan, on the one side you worship me and on the other you beat me.' The Muslim attackers were horrified to see that Sai Baba himself was all beaten about and covered with blood, and they begged to know who had done such a terrible thing. The saint again roared, 'Did you not beat me?' They answered that they had never come near their beloved Sai but had only beaten Mhalsapati. 'Who is in Mhalsapati? I am in him. He has surrendered to me and hence all his troubles are mine', he retorted. Sai Baba then summoned all the Hindus and Muslims together and told them, 'Dear children, you are all the progeny of one mother. Differences of caste and creed are external, the only thing that matters is to find the Divine within yourselves.'[30]

Thus, one of the main religious issues in India in the late-nineteenth early-twentieth century was the relationship between Hindus and Muslims, an issue still continuing. Today Sri Sathya Sai Baba is declaring that all religions are facets of the one truth, and his symbol is the *Sarva Dharma* emblem, which depicts the main five religions in India, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Zoroastrianism and Christianity. A sixth symbol, the Star of David representing Judaism, has since been added at the request of North American devotees. Sathya Sai Baba has said that his mission will embrace the whole world embracing all three of the world's great religions. He annouced in a discourse in July 1984, that there would be a Sai Trinity, a three-in-one Sai incarnation or triple *avatar of* Shirdi Sai, Sathya Sai and the future Prema Sai, who will represent - Islam, Hinduism and Christianity. As noted earlier, Sathya Sai Baba represents Hinduism. For Christianity, many Christians may interpret the future Prema Sai as the second coming of Christ as foretold. And in retrospect, thus, Shirdi Sai Baba represents Islam as the *Sufi*-Muslim contribution in this overall message of unity.

NOTES

1. One of the 'Eleven Promises of Hazrat Sai Baba of Shirdi', *see* Appendix A
2. Howard Murphet, *Beyond Death The Undiscover'd Country* (Quest Books, Wheaton, Ill: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1990) p. 197.
3. Ra Ganapati, *Baba: Satya Sai, Volume* I (Madras: Satya Jyoti, 1984) , p. 113.
4. Shakuntala Bala, *Living Divinity* (Bangalore: SB Publications, 1983), p. 40.
5. HU, 14.11. p. 260 (1991).
6. They are sometimes referred to as Hulmanis.
7. Subhan, *Sufism: Its Saints and Shrines*, p. 86.
8. CS. No. 474-506.
9. CS, No. 123.
10. DE, p. 19.
11. CS, No. 504.
12. CS, No. 503.
13. CS, No. 473.
14. *Sathya Sai Speaks: Discourses of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba*, vol. 3, comp. from notes taken by N. Kasturi, ed. *Sanathana Sarathi* (Prasanthi Nilayam: Sri Sathya Sai Books and Publications Trust, n.d.), pp. 20-5.
15. Arvind Sharma, "Siva, Skanda and the Urban Middle Class: A Study in the Sociology of Religion," *Man in India* (December 1984), 379.
16. Bala, *Living Divinity*, p. 40.
17. Sri Sathya Sai Baba, Divine Discourse 28th September 1990 entitled "Revelations about the Sai Avatar" printed in *Sanathana Sarathi*, October 1990 issue.
18. N. Kasturi, *Easwaramma - The Chosen Mother*. (Prasnathi Nilayam, 1984), p. 13.

19. Kasturi, *Easwaramma*, p. 11.
20. Kasturi, *Easwaramma*, p. 13.
21. Kasturi, *Easwaramma*, p. 12.
22. Kasturi, *Easwaramma*, p. 12.
23. V.S. Apte, *The Student's Sanskrit English Dictionary*. (Delhi: 1970), p. 59. In transliteration the word can be spelt *avadhuta* or alternatively *avadhoota*.
24. G.W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis*. (Calcutta 1938), p. 154.
25. Homer S. Youngs, Compiler, *Translations by Bäba*. privately published 1975. p. 25.
26. Youngs, *Translations*, p. 12.
27. As stated in the Preface, it is not the mandate of this book to discuss the statements of Sathya Sai Baba regarding Shirdi Sai Baba in any detail.
28. N. Kasturi, *Sathyam Sivam Sundaram*, 4 parts (Prasanthi Nilayam: Sri Sathya Sai Books and Publications Trust, 1961-75).
29. R.T. Kakade and A. Veerabhadra Rao, *Shirdi to Puttaparthi* (Hyderabad: Ira Publications, 1985).
30. Sri Sathya Sai Baba, 'The Shirdi Sai Saga: Mystery and Message', *Sanathana Sarathi* (November, 1992), p. 258.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Drawing the Threads Together

The primary impetus behind the research for this book was a sincere desire to understand and unravel some of the enigmaand paradox surrounding the life,actions and teachings of Sai Baba of Shirdi. This goal has been fulfilled far beyond what could even have been imagined at the start. While from one standpoint it is not at all important whether Sai Baba was a *Sufi*/Muslim or a Hindu - his message being universal - from another, it is valuable and worthwhile for if by fathoming his *Sufi*-Muslim connection, his more bizarre actions and statements take on new meaning, then he instantly becomes more comprehensible,approachable and endearing to devotees. At the beginning we suggested that the reader be the judge as evidence was presented to unfold this mystery. It has been shown that, while Sai Baba was most probably born to Brahmin parents, his upbringing, training and initial perspective was essentially *Sufi* - the mystic branch of Islam. We have discovered that Deccani Sufism had been well-established in Maharashtra since medieval times, and that Sai Baba was a mystic who emerged out of this indigenous tradition. Sufism, while adhering to the universal spirit of the *Qur'an*, does not always conform to the practices of orthodox Islam, relying to a great extent upon a mystic's own personal experience. Great emphasis is placed upon the individual *Sufi* Master's direct experience of God and from this apprehension a highly structured path has evolved over the centuries, in order to guide those who also wish to attain this experience. Sufism has often been proclaimed to be a universal path, for its practices and precepts are to be found in the mysticism of all religions. Idries Shah has commented that *Sufi* experience neither conflicts with other religions nor undermines them, and that *Sufi* understanding has operated within all faiths. This is the reason why Sai Baba's teaching is perceived to be universal and can therefore apply to spiritual seekers of all traditions. Mysticism and the love of God are also well-developed in the Hindu tradition, which is why Sai Baba can so easily be embraced as one of their own. We have shown not only that he practised *Sufi* precepts himself when young, but also that in later life he taught these as a *Sufi* Master or *pir* to Abdul and a stream of itinerant *faqirs*, who visited him in Shirdi. While his biographers consistently identify Sai Baba as Muslim, they often fail to make the finer distinction between Sufism and orthodox Islam. Sai Baba was not an orthodox Muslim and in fact was heterodox in many respects, and this has led to a certain confusion. But, when viewed in the light of the *Sufi* path, then his lifestyle and statements take on a deeper and more profound spiritual significance than intially seems apparent. A *Sufi*, it is said, must love all mankind, and though 'in the world is not of it'. This statement exactly describes Sai Baba, for he was pure love, not at all concerned with material objects, status or power, loving and caring only for the welfare of his devotees. It has also to be appreciated that Middle Eastern Islam and Sufism underwent certain modifications in the Indian context from its contacts with *bhakti* Hinduism, particularly in the Deccan. While Sai Baba lived in Shirdi for six decades as a *Sufi faqir*, it was only during his last eight years that Hindu devotees were attracted to Shirdi. It was only in his final two or three years that he allowed any Hindu ritualistic practices to be performed in his honour, and then only to please the devotees. However, this extremely short period at the very end of his life has overwhelmingly coloured the prevailing perception of him disseminated by the biographies, and made it easy for him to be interpreted and embraced as a Hindu saint.

Many people today deny that Sufism is connected to Islam at all because it is so universally applicable. However, all *Sufi* saints of the past were very careful to enunciate their philosophy in the light of the *Qur'an* and sayings of the Prophet, and couched their teaching in terms of the stations and states of the *Sufi tariqat*. The concluding question is, therefore, why did Sai Baba of Shirdi choose the *Sufi* path while Sri Sathya Sai Baba so obviously endorses Hindu spirituality? We have already touched on the answer. The *Bhagavad Gita* informs us that God descends as an *avatar* in every age. The current age is known as the *Kaliyuga* and is a two-edged sword. It is the age of darkness and wickedness, yet it is also said to be the age when it is easiest for the spiritual aspirant to attain the realization of God. Shirdi Sai Baba's message was that the ultimate God encompasses all the Names and forms of God in every religion. Although the *avatar* always incarnates in India, he is not exclusively a Hindu Divinity, but acts universally for those willing to listen. According to Sathya Sai Baba, so prevalent are the forces of evil in the world at this time that it will take a triple *avatar* or descent of God to usher in a new golden age. This triple descent is Shirdi Sai Baba from 1838-1918, Sathya Sai Baba 1926-2022, and Prema Sai who is predicted to be born in the year 2030. If Shirdi Sai represents the Islamic world, Sathya Sai the Hindu world and Prema Sai the Christian world as the second coming of Christ, the Sai message of unity and love will soon reach out to the whole world.

Many Hindu authors have earnestly tried to interpret Sai Baba from a Hindu standpoint, yet still he is an enigma. Perhaps this is due to his severe asceticism, his uncompromising vow of poverty and unfathomable mystic statements, which do not fit the more familiar Hindu mode. Sathya Sai Baba is perceived to be gentler, softer, more understandable, forgiving and full of love. Many devotees of Sathya Sai Baba reveal that they do not feel drawn to the Shirdi incarnation, possibly because he doe not fit one's expectations as a Hindu guru. Conversely, interviewing Shirdi Sai devotees, they express the opposite, that they are not drawn to the more exotic 'Afro'-haired, orange-silk-garbed current *avatar*. The author herself, who has long studied Sathya Sai Baba's teachings, has been amazed how similar at core are these teachings compared to those of Shirdi Sai Baba, even though externally the two saints appear to be so different.

Comprehending Sai Baba's *Sufi* and Muslim orientation helps us to understand many of his more bizarre actions and the meaning of his unfathomable statements as has been revealed in the section on the *Sufi tariqat* in Part II. In order to find the truth and restore the balance between his status as a *Sufi awliya* and Hindu *sadguru* we have gleaned the literature for subtle references to his prior five and a half decades as a Muslim mystic. His 'official' biographer and devotee, R.G. Dabholkar, began composing his Marathi biography of Sai Baba, the *Sri Sai Saccarita* in 1911, with the latter's full endorsement while most of the other writings on Sai Baba were written after his death. While Hindu himself, Dabholkar faithfully wrote the things he saw in Shirdi, not omitting Muslim or *Sufi* aspects of the saint. Sai Baba emerges from his biographies as a Muslim mystic or *Sufi,* who had realized God. That Sai Baba was well versed in Islamic doctrines and, more specifically, the *Sufi tariqat* has been illustrated from the subtle allusions in the biographical accounts in Marathi and English, as well as the *Saibaba MS*, which is the record kept by his Muslim disciple Abdul, firmly establishing Sai Baba's original Muslim orientation. The finding of this Urdu notebook of Abdul was the icing of the cake so to speak - a final proof of Sai Baba's profound awareness and knowledge of Islamic tradition and mystic Sufism.

Sai Baba, as a teacher, is described as urging his devotees and disciples to repeat God's name, to love God and cultivate such virtues as voluntary poverty, patience, forbearance and avoidance of sin. While most of these qualities are common to all traditions they also echo the *Sufi tariqat*. Sai Baba is described by his biographers as admonishing his devotees to adhere to the cultivation of ethical codes which would lead them to the ultimate experience of God-realization. Through his spiritual powers, Sai Baba is credited with healing sick people and fulfilling the wishes of his devotees for wealth and children. He is also described as saving individuals from major calamities such as plagues and epidemics, and rescuing them from fire and storms and protecting them from otherwise sure death. The Hindu biographers write that on occasion Sai Baba would cook meat, usually mutton or chicken for the *faqirs*, and would eat it himself but only that which was considered ritually pure or *halal* according to Muslim dietary laws. He defended the recitation of Muslim prayers in Shirdi and occasionally allowed Muslim festivals to be celebrated. Sai Baba openly admitted to being a Muslim and some Hindu visitors were reluctant to approach him on account of his well-known Muslim reputation and appearance; Brahmans were particularly concerned for fear of ritual pollution. His Muslim predecessors from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries like Muntoji Bahamani, Shekh Mahammad and Shah Muni also did not hide their Muslim identities. They, too, were reproached in their times as being Muslim in largely Hindu surroundings.

Sai Baba belonged to a region in Maharashtra known for its *Sufi* centres and activities. There is a consensus that he was born in Pathri, known as a centre of the Qadiriyya Order, a place full of *Sufi dargahs*, and with a Muslim population outnumbering the Hindus of that city. Khuldabad, near Aurangabad, the place where Sai Baba reportedly spent some time in a retreat cave, was a major *Sufi* centre in Maharashtra in the past. Shirdi lies in close proximity to the above areas of *Sufi* concentration. The sketch of Sai Baba's childhood and youth suggests that he was initiated by a *Sufi* Master. While his affiliation with the Chisthiyya Order is difficult to establish, both the *Saibaba MS* and statements found in the biographical material strongly hint at it. For instance, he is regarded by Meher Baba as the incarnation of a Chisthi saint, Zar Zari Ẓar Bakhsh. Like the Chisthi's unique endorsement of *sama*, dance and music, to induce divine ecstatic experience, Sai Baba articulates his liking for *qawwalis* (Persion devotional songs). His biographers recall that he used to sing and dance Persian songs, and actively encouraged Das Ganu to become a *kirtankar*. In the list of *Sufi* teachers and schools which Abdul refers to in the *Saibaba MS*, the Chistiyya Order is most often mentioned. Abdul was his *Sufi* disciple, and on Sai Baba's death, he remained as the keeper of Sai Baba's *dargah* for four years until it was taken over by a Hindu trust..

Sai Baba's teaching is rooted in the *Bhakti-Sufi* traditions of Maharashtra. The poet-saints of the *bhakti* movement and Muslim *Sufi* poets were all engaged in seeking God-realization, and they all used the local Marathi medium to preach their *Bhakti-Sufi* messages. The writings of Jnaneswar, Eknath, Tukaram and others, and those of Muntoji Bahamani, Shekh Mahammad and Shah Muni have been cited to illustrate the intense religious ferment taking place in Maharashtra since the sixteenth century. The Maharashtrian Hindu *bhakti* poets' ideas indicate a Hindu-Muslim sharing of religious concepts, more specifically the mystical ideas of God-realization. Sai Baba's own biographical details, his teachings, and his accommodative approach to Hindus, must be understood against this syncretic Maharashtrian B*hakti-Sufi* background. It must be reiterated here that Maharashtra in the nineteenth century was predominantly a Hindu area, and Muslims constituted only two to three per cent of the population, although today the percentage is a little higher. Sai Baba and his predecessor Muslim *Sufis* operated within this background.

Shekh Mahammad used Hindu symbols and Hindu imagery and metaphors to elucidate his *Sufi* messages, without compromising his Muslim faith, while Shah Muni also spread his message in mainly Hindu surroundings. Similarly Sai Baba when speaking to Hindu devotees accommodated his language using Hindu symbols. In the *Saibaba MS*, Sai Baba's teachings are similar to those of Shah Muni. Sai Baba equates Brahma with Ali, and Vishnu with *Allah*. Shah Muni, in his *Siddhanta Bodha*, unequivocally equates Narayan with *Allah*, and the Vedas with the *Qur'an*. For Shekh Mahammad, the Hindu *Hari* and Muslim *Allah* are manifestations of the same God. For Muntoji Bahamani, the sacred Hindu syllable *Om* and the Muslim invocation *Bismillah*, are the same. In the *Saibaba MS* the reincarnated Hindu Gods, the *avataras* and sages are like the prophets of Islam; they are not Gods. Sai Baba in the *Saibaba MS* is called an *avatar* in the *Kali yuga* (the dark age). To Shekh Mahammad, Rama and Ganesha and the host of other known Hindu Gods are only names of God. Shah Muni accommodates Hindu gods to the point of saying that he and his ancestors were their followers. The process of accommodation of Hindu religious ideas without sacrificing Islamic ideals and convictions is a key to all the above Maharashtrian *Sufis'* strategies. Throughout this book there have been constant hints of a complex process of Hindu interpretation of and claim to the person and shrine of Sai Baba. None of the scholars who have previously written on Sai Baba have pursued this theme in any detail, for fear of upsetting Hindu sensibilities. However, it should be a cause for rejoicing, for the essential message of Sai Baba is that there is no real difference between the *Sufi*-Muslim and the *bhakti* Hindu message - a fact which should lead to the end of sectarian violence.

Although Sai Baba had stated that he was born of Brahmin parents, his subsequent childhood upbringing was *Sufi* through the *faqir* and his wife who cared for him, and later by a *Sufi* guru as we have argued earlier. On a number of occasions he declared his Muslim status. However the biographers tend to ignore these statements, laying more stress on his Brahmin ancestry. The Hindus interpreted Sai Baba as an incarnation of the Hindu god Dattatreya, and Sai Baba, ever willing to demonstrate the essential oneness of all deities, acceded to this interpretation. This was a significant identification because it led eventually to his deification, which culminated in the installation of his statue in the *Samadhi Mandir* in 1952, and in worship conducted to it in the manner of a Hindu deity. This latter event was a significant step in the Hinduization process of Sai Baba. Sai Baba himself, during the final years of his life, may have contributed to this process by accepting Hindu *puja* and *arati* rituals to be conducted to his person by his devotees. Also the fact that he allowed his *urs* festival to be merged with the Hindu *Ramnavami* festival, forming a joint celebration, while he was still alive, gave newcomers the impression that he must be Hindu and in subsequent years that he was a Hindu saint. There has been a proliferation of small shrines, pictures and images of Sai Baba promoted by the Hindus in recent decades, and now marble images of Sai Baba are being taken to other countries around the world. All these images are worshipped in the same ritualistic manner with which a Hindu deity would be honoured, such as *arthi* and *abhishekam* etc. However, it is very sad that while Sai Baba is still being promoted as an arbiter of Hindu-Muslim unity, yet the fact that statues of Sai Baba are set up at all, effectively precluding Muslims from entering his precincts. This is due to the prohibition in Islam of anthropomorphic representations of God or saints. Thus, an exclusively Hindu portrayal of Sai Baba is still being promoted today.

The thrust of this book has been to set the record straight. Initially we stated that however great a saint was, it was always apparent that he emerged from a specific tradition, and was influenced by the historical period into which he was born - for example, Jesus from Judaism, the Buddha from Hinduism and Baba Farid from Sufism. While this background has been obscured in the case of Sai Baba, research soon reveals that Sai Baba was essentially a mystic, not only familiar with *Sufi* precepts but also practising those maxims of the *Sufi* tradition, such as poverty and repetition of the name of *Allah*, all his life. Having reached the ultimate goal of the *Sufis*, he became divine. Bedil, the *Sufi* of Sina, who wrote his poem in the eleventh century, could well have had Hazrat Sai Baba of Shirdi in mind, so absolute is his understanding of those who mystically attain God in the *Sufi* tradition:

> These men do never die,
> They become the Praised Ones.
> They bestow mercy on the world with myriad hands.
> They help the helpless.
> They aid the depressed.
> They leave not those that follow them
> When the time of danger comes.
> They are men, only in name.
> In reality, they are God Himself.
> These solitary ones are marvellous.

Sai Baba's own ineffable utterances confirm that he knew that he had attained to this Divine status declaring on occasion the Arabic expression "*Anal Haq*"or I am God, and "I am everywhere and in all places and the whole world is with me". On an academic level we are out of our depth metaphorically speaking, for only those who have reached the sublime reality 'know' of it and can speak of it for words fail to elucidate it. What makes Sai Baba so amazing is that his claims of absolute Divinity are being accepted today as true in the eyes and experience of thousands or maybe even millions of devotees around the world. His Divine status he substantiates by demonstration - prayers are answered, and he appears in dreams or visions to offer healing or tangible help - he even appears in the flesh occasionally to help his devotees, more than eighty years after his physical demise. From a handful of devotees at his death to his phenomenal popularity today, it is his response to prayer that gives proof to the Divinity of Sai Baba - hence the title of this book *Shirdi Sai Baba -The Divine Sufi*. As Bedil the *Sufi* declares, 'These men do never die...in reality, they are God himself'.

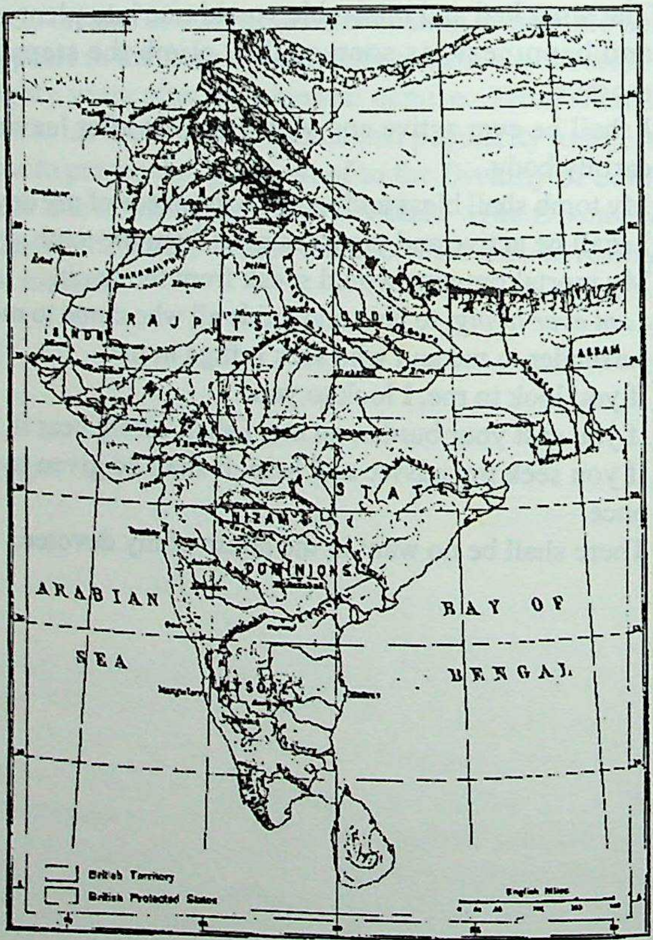
APPENDIX A

The Eleven Promises of Sai Baba of Shirdi[1]

1. Whosoever puts his feet on Shirdi soil, his sufferings would come to an end.
2. The wretched and miserable would rise into plenty of joy and happiness, as soon as they climb the steps of my mosque.
3. I shall be ever active and vigorous even after leaving this earthly body.
4. My tomb shall bless and speak to the needs of my devotees.
5. I shall be active and vigorous even from the tomb.
6. My mortal remains would speak from the tomb.
7. *I am ever living*, to help and guide all who come to me, who surrender to me and who seek refuge in me.
8. If you look to me, I look to you.
9. If you cast your burden on me, I shall surely bear it.
10. If you seek my advice and help, it shall be given to you at once.
11. There shall be no want in the house of my devotee.

APPENDIX B

Map showing the Location of the Independent Nizams Dominions circa 1848[1]


SIKHS
BAHAWALPUR
RAJPUTS
SINDH
OUDH
ASSAM
STATES
NIZAM'S
DOMINIONS
ARABIAN
SEA
BAY OF
BENGAL
MYSORE
Mangalore
British Territory
British Protected States
English Miles

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[1] Charles S.J. Joppen, *Historical Atlas of India* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1907), p. 23.

APPENDIX C

1857: Sai Baba and The War of Independence

In retrospect, the year 1857 is pivotal in the understanding of India's recent history, being hailed as 'one of the most written about episodes in Indian history'.[1] An uprising of local *sepoys* in the British army was to mark the beginning of a growing awareness of India as a nation in its own right, rather than a conglomeration of separate states or a permanent vassal of Britain. The events precipitating this awareness are variously known as the Great Rebellion, the Sepoy Mutiny or the War of Independence depending on whether the viewpoint is British or Indian. It was at the end of this uprising in 1858 that a young man of unknown name, soon to be hailed as Sai Baba, made his debut on the Indian stage - his presence registering on local memory in the village of Shirdi in Maharashtra in that year. Even this date is not certain, for in biographies of the saint, some detail 1856 as his birth date,[2] and others as the date he came to Shirdi and stayed permanently. If we accept his birthdate to be 1838, as is now most generally accepted, then Sai Baba would have been a young man of nineteen in 1857. Sai Baba is said to have visited Shirdi very briefly three or four years prior to his return to stay there permanently and, according to the hagiography, Sai Baba wandered from place to place in the general area of Marathwada, especially around Aurangabad.

The question which then arises is, where did he go and what did he do in those intervening years? The late teen years are an idealistic time of life when a young man can hardly ignore a war, especially when the battlefield is a mere few hundred miles away. In an interview with Sri Narasimhaswami on July 26, 1936, Balakrishna Govind Upasani Sastri, the brother of Sri Upasani Maharaj who, by the time of the interview, had become a famous saint in Maharashtra by the grace of Sai Baba, gave his reminiscences of Sai Baba both on his own account and in relation to his famous brother. In the course of his conversation he commented:

> Sai Baba mentioned some autobiographical reminiscences of his own. He said he had been at the battle in which the Rani of Jhansi took part. He was there in the army.[3]

Sri Narasimhaswami makes use of this piece of information in his biography '*Life of Sai Baba, Volume IV*', where he says, 'Baba declared that in the first great war of Indian Independence, that he had been in the army with the Rani of Jhansi. That is he was a fighter for Indian Independence in 1857.'[4] These two related references are the only ones linking Sai Baba with the '1857 Sepoy Revolt', or as it later became known, 'The War of Independence'. Narasimhaswami, by his comment that Sai Baba was a fighter for Indian Independence, assumes Sastri was saying that Sai Baba was on the side of the Rani, but in fact he merely states that he was at the battle. In those days the army was the British army so if he says he was there in the army it probably meant the British army. Narasimhaswami, writing almost a hundred years later (his Part IV of *Life of Sai Baba* published around 1955 or 56) reflects the current inflated view of the 1857 episode as a struggle against British rule. However, at the time it was probably just a local revolt, with no thought of the later ramifications. The story of the Rani of Jhansi is an inspiring one and well worth an investigation. There may well be references to the individual known later as Sai Baba, but we have no way of knowing under what name he was known at this date, for in the last decades of his life when his statements were being recorded, he rarely referred to his early years.

The character of the person who is relaying this information concerning Sai Baba's involvement in the 1857 war, has to be considered. Balakrishna Upasani Sastri was from a renowned family and was a Professor of Sanskrit, a responsible person not given to inventing stories. He was the brother of Sri Upasani Maharaj who enjoyed special spiritual favours from Sai Baba due to a previous life connection termed *rinanubandha*. He was therefore closer than many to the saint because of his brother, and obviously was present when Sai Baba made this remark. He called it an autobiographical reminiscence of Sai Baba, but if he were intent on concocting such a story, then surely he would have elaborated on the subject some more. His bald statement sounds like a genuine remembrance as it was a remark made in passing, leaving us with a tantalising lack of detailed information. Narasimhaswami, who endorsed this statement by Sastri by quoting it in his biography of the saint, was careful to reject any testimonies, experiences or memories that he thought were dubious. He was qualified to do this in his former capacity as an Advocate, ferreting out the truth, as he did in his law cases.

There are three scenarios we have to consider here. Firstly, that Sai Baba, having been brought up by a *Sufi* faqir, was so intent on his own *Sufi* practices, the results of which were to be amply demonstrated in his later life, that he took absolutely no part in the war. The reference given by Upasani Sastri, a retired Sanskrit Professor of Poona, would in this case be plainly wrong, and can be rejected as one of the mystic's more bizarre statements. Secondly, that as part of *Sufi* philosophy is the upholding of law and order and protection of one's mother country, he may have joined the army even though he may not have physically taken up arms. Thirdly, that as an *avatar* his spiritual mission would include the freeing of *Bharat*, the ancient word for India, from foreign domination, and so this movement was set in motion which would culminate 90 years later in *Swaraj* or Independence for India. This scenario is also supported by the statement given by Narasimhaswami, for even though the Rani ostensibly failed in her immediate objective and lost her life, the idea for which she died eventually came to fruition in 1947. This third scenario assumes Sai Baba fought on the side of the Rani. Without further corroboration it is impossible to say which scenario is correct.

However, there are a number of references elsewhere to Sai Baba's role in the universe and in particular there is a reference to the First World War. Purdom, a disciple of Meher Baba, states that 'One day [Meher] Baba said that it was Sai Baba who controlled the Great War'.[5] Although this statement is similarly enigmatic, it indicates the possibility that the third interpretation has some truth.

Before the story of the Rani of Jhansi can be related, the whole uprising and revolt of the *sepoys* at Meerut in the year 1857 needs to be put briefly into perspective. It is only by looking back from our vantage point of more than a hundred years later, that its true significance can be understood. Although a number of books have been published elevating the events of 1857 into the first War of Indian Independence,[6] all of the authors agree that gaining independence from British Imperial rule was not the initial motivation. Surendra Nath Sen in his 'official' history of the war of 1857 admits that he *cannot* present the war as a nationalist struggle.[7] Thus while patriotic fervour was not the cause of the war, it is interesting to note that this was one of the factors which eventually led to the granting of Independence in 1947. The British, on the other hand, saw the rebellion as merely a local revolt of *sepoys* - Indian infantrymen conscripted into the British army - which spread to other areas, and was finally stamped out with the use of military force. However, the discontent which lay behind the revolt had been smouldering for a long time before the fire broke out, and, although the outbreak was quickly put down, the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 marks the beginning of the end of the British in India as an occupying power.

The British initially came to India in the early 17th-century as traders and merchants, and were granted trading rights by the Mughals. An East India Trading Company was formed and for decades a valuable sea trade benefited both nations. With the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, Mughal power began to disintegrate and local Hindu nobles and Mughal governors set up independent principalities. The East India Company found itself becoming a law-keeper to police local squabbles, so becoming in the process a military as well as a mercantile power. The result was an army, which, by the time of the European conflict between England and France, came to engage in battle with the French who also had trading posts. Under Robert Clive the British defeated the Nawab at Plassey, and as a result the British became the virtual masters of Bengal. The East India Company extended its power and influence and in 1773 the British Houses of Parliament assumed control of the administration of India under Warren Hastings. Three Presidencies were set up, Bengal, Madras and Bombay, each with its own army, manned by native infantrymen called *sepoys* and cavalry, known as *sowars*. The East India Company had the legal title to act as Dewan or agent of the Mughal Emperor for Bengal, Bihar and Orissa only, but in 1847 the Marquis of Dalhousie, having been appointed as Governor-General, began what has been called 'a disastrous and rapacious policy' of annexing Indian states. As a result many of these states developed genuine grievances against the British, and one such state was Jhansi.

A number of books were written on the story of the Rani of Jhansi to coincide with the 100-year anniversary of her death (1858-1958), reassessing her role in the war, and these books can be recommended to the interested reader.[8] In that 100 years she has been transformed from 'a traitorous murderer' who in June 1857 ordered the massacre of English officers and their wives and children, to the 'Joan of Arc of India' - an ideal of womanly courage, fortitude and military prowess. Until recently any early biographer of Sai Baba might not have wanted his holy name linked to that of Laksmibai Rani of Jhansi, who was so negatively depicted by British authors as a villainess revelling in cruelty and murder. It is possible that any evidence of his participation could well have been suppressed by Sai Baba's biographers, Dabholkar and Narasimhaswami for this reason. However, Indian writers such as Sen, Majumdar and Tarmankar began to reassess her character and role from the Indian point of view, and reinterpreted her role in the light of the struggle for independence.

A brief synopsis of the story is in order here. Jhansi is part of the region known as Bundelkhand on the northern edge of the vast

Deccan plain about 250 miles south of Delhi. There is a long history of Hindu-Muslim rivalry for domination of the area. In the more recent past it had had good relations with the British, who conferred upon Ramachandra Rao the title of *Maharaja* in recognition of his loyal services, at which time his heirs also were deemed 'hereditary rulers' of Jhansi. Ramachandra Rao died in 1835 and was succeeded by his brother Gangadhar Rao, who also maintained excellent relations with the British. Childless after his first wife's death, he married for a second time, a commoner, a young girl named Manu Tambe, who was then known as Laksmibai - the *Maharani* of Jhansi. Her only child died, and so Gangadhar legally adopted a son called Damodhar. This was officially done according to both British law and Hindu custom, and at his death in 1853, his new 'son' should accordingly have become the *Raja* and his widow the Regent of the State. However, the Rani Laksmibai, soon became disenchanted with both the British Government and Lord Dalhousie when it became apparent that they would neither recognise the legally adopted son as *Raja,* nor her own position as Regent. Dalhousie annexed the kingdom of Jhansi and placed it directly under British rule, as part of his 'policy of lapse', thereby violating the ancient Indian right of a monarch to select his own successor. The Rani wrote many letters, pleading for her rights, citing the earlier agreement of hereditary rights. Dalhousie ignored her pleas, and in implementing the annexation showed great insensitivity towards the Rani's position. He took over the huge wealth and jewels of the State treasury, awarding the Rani a very small monthly pension, yet still held her responsible for former State debts. The State of Jhansi also suffered great social disruptions with the annexation, such as the unemployment of troops, courtiers, and court retainers. The traditional economy was ruined for there was no longer court demand for the wares of the craftsmen. The old ways were gradually displaced by British systems of administration including western education, and a railway transportation system. New social legislation was enacted bearing on infanticide, and the customs surrounding *sati* (widows who were cremated along with their dead husbands) and the remarriage of widows. The decision of the new rulers to slaughter cows in the city, with total disregard for the religious sensitivity of the people, was another cause of the growing enmity between the British Raj and the Indian population. However, the aspect of change that was most feared by Hindus and Muslims alike was the British determination to bring Christianity to the whole of India, thereby replacing the ancient faiths.

The Rani regarded herself as grievously wronged, and her appearance as the sweet young widow belied the tigress underneath. From her bitter hatred grew plans to retaliate, and involvement with plots of uprisings in other areas. The one event that united the rebels and is credited with being the spark that ignited the revolt, was the method of firing the new Enfield rifle that had just been issued to the army. It involved using the teeth to load the cartridge into the gun and this cartridge was rumored (falsely it is said) to be covered with a thick grease, a combination of beef and pork lard. In the Hindu caste system this simple act of the teeth and lips coming into contact with animal fat could cause a man to become polluted and thus lose his caste status. Due to both the ignorance and insensitivity of the British to caste and to the dietary restrictions of both Hinduism and Islam, this loading procedure came as the final insult. Cows are held as sacred animals in India and therefore cow-killing and beef-eating is a great sin to Hindus, and Muslims abhor the eating of pig or pork. Thus both Hindus and Muslims were greatly upset.

The opportunity to retaliate came when a number of the *sepoys* at Meerut refused to use the greased cartridges, and were imprisoned by the British for refusing orders. The rest of the *sepoys* revolted, freeing their fellows, and the revolt spread like wildfire to the fort at Jhansi. Here the *sepoys* released all the convicts and laid seige to the Fort. The English officers and men were separated from their families, and decided to surrender. The discontent of the populace however, boiled over and the hatred of the newly released convicts resulted in cruel bloodshed. Tarmankar details the bloody massacre of the British soldiers and their families outside the walls of the Jhansi fort.[9] The Rani was held responsible for the terrible massacre in all of the British accounts in the 19th century.[10] She came to be portrayed as the 'Jezebel of India' who 'nursed her resentment' until she eventually 'enticed the British officers and their families to accept her protection, and then had them foully murdered'.[11]

After the massacre the Rani made brave attempts to re-establish the city, restore normal life, and retrain her army, fearing reprisals from the British. These soon came in early 1858, in the form of a British campaign on Jhansi when they attacked and captured first the Fort of Jhansi and then Kalpi. Laksmibai was killed fighting in battle before the seige of Gwalior, and her death signalled defeat for the rebels. Indian scholars are reassessing her role in this conflict which is now being seen in a new light. The Sepoy Revolt is now identified as the First War of Independence, and the Rani is recast in the role of heroine.

British power had grown through slow penetration from mere trading status to full-blown political and civil domination. There had been no outright conquest but a subtle take-over as well as a systematic plundering of the wealth of India. Around the middle of the century some awareness of the loss of control that had arisen over the preceding two centuries suddenly began to seep into the consciousness of the people. India was now controlled by a foreign power, her wealth plundered, her language undermined - the Persian official language of Court was replaced by English in 1835 - her coinage replaced by that struck by the Company, and her sovereignty compromised in hundreds of other ways. There was also great fear that the British were trying to enforce Christianity, a fear caused no doubt by the over-zealousness of some missionaries. No wonder therefore, once local *sepoy* discontent had erupted into Mutiny, that civil disaffection spread.

India's position was certainly desperate in 1857, even though there was scant sympathy at first for the uprising. In this situation the pundits could only turn to their sacred texts for guidance. The Hindu Tradition has much to say on such a situation. According to the ancient *Puranas*, time is viewed on a much grander scale than is envisioned by most historians. Time is cyclical, divided into world eras or *yugas*, each consisting of many thousands of years. In the *bhakti* (devotional) tradition, the fourth *yuga* is named the *Kali yuga*, when *dharma* or righreousness is deemed to be low, or in *Puranic* terminology 'standing on one leg only'. At such a time it is averred that God will incarnate with divine powers in human form called an *avatar*. This conviction is strengthened by the often quoted sloka in the *Bhagavad Gita*: *dharma samsthapanarthaya sambhavami yuge yuge* - For the sake of establishing righteousness, I come into being from age to age.[12]

There were many suggestions throughout the 19th-century as to the identity of the expected *avatar*. The devotees of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa proclaimed him to be the *avatar*; while the followers of Meher Baba named him - *Avatar* Meher Baba. Similarly the subject of this book, Sai Baba of Shirdi, was given the title *Avatar* during his lifetime, but one could also argue that all devotees wish to raise their own guru or master to the highest level, adding the supreme title of '*Avatar*'. What is relevant here is to note the timing of Sai Baba's appearance at such a crucial time. From Upasani Sastri's comment, whether he is considered an *avatar* or not, Sai Baba can be placed at the scene when India seemed to have lost everything and righteosuness was a low ebb. At a period when Hindu and Muslim relations very uneasy Sai Baba came to stand for unity, disregarding labels such as Hindu or Muslim, the stress being on the quality of the devotees' love of God. Chatterji notes,

> An essential feature of the rereading of the history of the period is the emphasis placed on Hindu-Muslim unity, with the point being made that the two religious communities were moved by a common impulse to create a free India.[13]

Attempts have been made to place Sai Baba more literally in the 1857 War. In his book '*Eighteen fifty-seven*', Surendra Nath Sen makes the comment:

> Nana Saheb Peshwa had utilised the service of a few, and relied heavily on the magical power of a necromancer, Dassa Bawa, and was financed by Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu and Seth Lakshmichand of Mathura... Dass Baba had caused a small idol of lotus seeds to be made and divided into small fragments. Each fragment was placed in a chapatti, and as far as chapatties went, Nana's influence was expected to prevail.[14]

Sholarpukar quotes this statement in his book,[15] and without saying so directly, leaves one thinking that this Dassa Baba could possibly turn out to be Sai Baba. Simple research shows that this name is more correctly Dassa Bawa not Baba, and turns up the existence of a manuscript which describes Dassa Bawa as the guru of Nana Sahib 'said to have come from a place called Kalee Dhar, beyond Kangra, this side of Jummoo'[16] and 'that there is no man in all Hindustan like Dassa Bawa. He is a most able man. He is about 125 years old'.[17] There is, therefore, no chance that this man can in any way be confused with the 22-year-old Sai Baba.

According to Majumdar, 'the all-powerful Dassa Bawa, aged 125', has also been credited by Sitaram Bawa with 'not only leading the conspiracy of all native rulers, but also took charge of organising a simultaneous mutiny all over India'[18] While dismissing Dassa Bawa the story of the *chapatis*, mentioned in the earlier quotation, makes a fascinating mystery which has not been satisfactorily resolved to this day. The story of the *chapatis* is included in even the most serious and scholarly accounts of 1857. During 1856-7 small round *chapatis* of unleavened bread were being handed around, inside of which were, according to some accounts, lotus flowers, and to others, lotus seeds. Sometimes the Government is credited with issuing them, while other accounts tell of secret groups passing around chapatis like chain letters. The idea was to receive a *chapati*, and then bake five or ten more to pass on to others or else dire consequences would result. Many explanations have been attempted of this mysterious event, characterising it either as a conspiracy, or as a practical means of control of a cholera epidemic, or as a manifestation of magical power. That Sholapurkar might have connected Sai Baba with the story of the *chapatis* from the miraculous point of view, is credible. But the link of Sai Baba with Dassa Bawa is not credible. We may simply observe that the emergence of Sai Baba in Maharashtra coincides with an important change in political atmosphere, initiated by the events of 1857. An interesting point is that the uprising was strong in the probable area of distribution of the *chapatis*, and it must be noted that the *jadoo* did not promise success, but rather a show of determination to throw off the shackles of the East India Company's Raj. In that sense the *chapati* charm fulfilled its promise.

There is no satisfactory conclusion. Sastri's comments purport to be Sai Baba's own words that he was present at the battle in which the Rani of Jhansi took part. This story is just a matter of belief or rejection, as neither supporting nor opposing evidence has come to light. At the time of the war, Sai Baba was a young *faqir* practising the *sufi tariqat*, not yet 'perfected' or God-realised, and it is possible therefore, that he was in the army. Tajuddin Baba, another contemporary *sufi faqir* whose story is given in Chapter Eight, was also enlisted in the British army before he experienced God-realization and abandoned worldly life. Such an event was not therefore unprecedented. Finally, we may note that Meher Baba includes both Sai Baba and Tajuddin Baba as being two of the five 'Perfect' Masters in the world at that time.

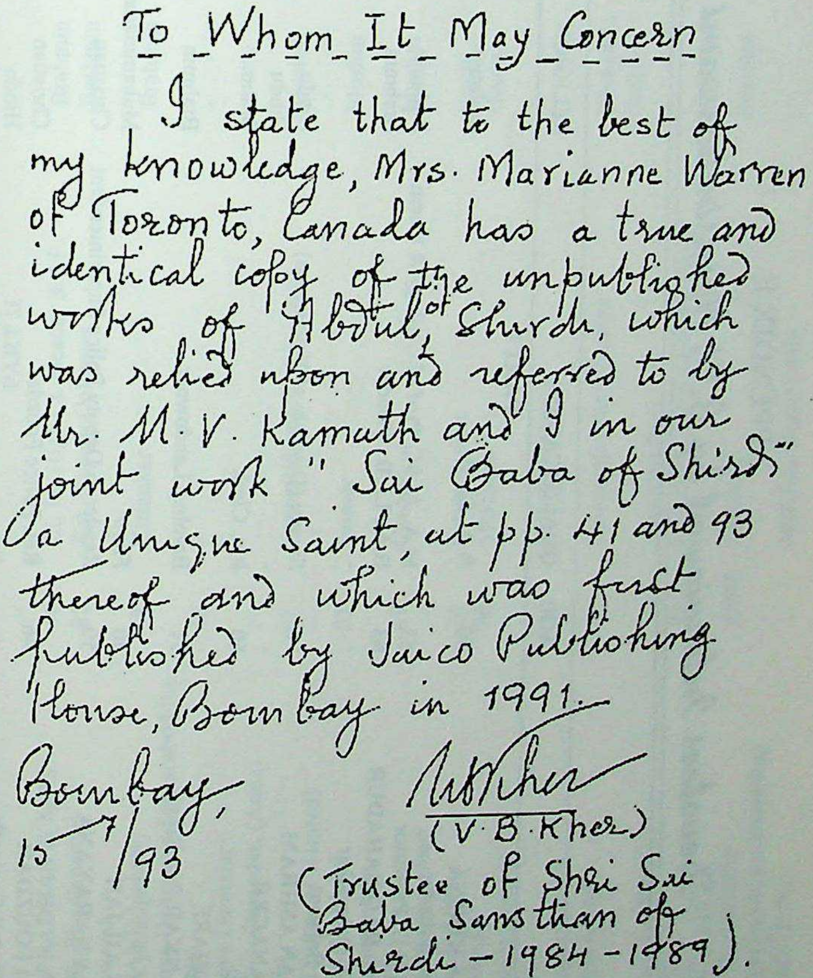
NOTES

1. Ainslie T. Embree, *1857 in India: Mutiny or War of Independence.* (Boston: 1963), p. vii.
2. Osborne, *The Incredible Sai Baba*, p. 1.
3. DE, p. 210.
4. LSB, IV:103.
5. Purdom, *The Perfect Master*, p. 108.
6. For example V.D. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence, 1857.* (Bombay: 1909).
7. Surendra Nath Sen, *Eighteen Fifty-seven.* (Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India, 1957, p.xii.

8. T.V Tahmankar, *The Ranee of Jhansi*. (London: 1958), and S.N. Sinha, *Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi*. (Allahabad: 1980).
9. Tahmankar, *The Ranee of Jhansi*, p. 67.
10. British writers such as Dr. Lowe, Montgomery Martin, Dr. Sylvester, and Col. Malleson.
11. Tarmankar, *The Ranee of Jhansi*, quoting Malleson p.70.
12. *The Bhagavad-Gita*, trans. Winthrop Sargeant, revised, ed. Christopher Chapple (New York: State University of New York Press, 1884),: IV:8.
13. N. Chatterji, 'An Episode in India's Freedom Struggle', quoted in Ainslie T. Embree, *1857 In India -Mutiny or War of Independence*, (Boston: 1966).
14. Sen, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven*, p. 401.
15. G.R. Sholapurkar, *Footprints at Shirdi and Puttaparthi*. (Delhi: 1985), p. 9.
16. R.C. Majumdar, *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857*. (Calcutta: 1963), p. 342.
17. Majumdar, *The Sepoy Mutiny*, p. 344.
18. Majumdar, *The Sepoy Mutiny*, p. 367.

APPENDIX D

Authentication of Abdul's Notebook as a True and Identical Copy



To Whom It May Concern

I state that to the best of my knowledge, Mrs. Marianne Warren of Toronto, Canada has a true and identical copy of the unpublished works of Abdul of Shirdi, which was relied upon and referred to by Mr. M.V. Kamath and I in our joint work "Sai Baba of Shirdi" a Unique Saint, at pp. 41 and 93 thereof and which was first published by Jaico Publishing House, Bombay in 1991.

Bombay,
15/7/93

(V.B. Kher)
(Trustee of Shri Sai Baba Sansthan of Shirdi – 1984 – 1989).

APPENDIX E

Devotees Interviewed by B.V. Narasimhaswami in 1936

NAME	AGE	QUALIFICATION	RELIGION	YEAR TO SB
		PART I		
CHINNA KISTNA Raosaheb Bahadur	50	B.A., LL.B.	Brahmin	1910
NARKE G.G. Professor	53	M.A., M.SC. Prof of Geology & Chem.	Brahmin	1913
DHUMAL RAO BAHADUR	63	B.A., LL.B., Pleader	Brahmin	1907
NACHNE Dahanukar Samaram Balwant	-	-	-	1912
NARAYAN ASHRAM	58	Swami (Disciple of Vedasrama)	Hindu	1910
MRS MANAGER	-	-	Hindu	pre 1915
Raghuvir B. **PURANDHARE**	60	Ret. Clerk	Brahmin	1909
GALWANKAR Rao Saheb Yeshwant Janardan	51	Bombay Landowner	Brahmin	1911
ABDULLAH JAN	40	*Faqir*	Muhammadan	1913
CHAKRA NARAYANA Christian	50	Reader to Deputy Police Superintendent	Christian	1918
JOSEPH FOUZDAR	46	Ret. Police Fouzdar	Christian	1917
JOSHI Dadaji Gopinath	-	-	Hindu	1932

PART II

M.W. PRADHAN & MRS.	56	LL.B., High Ct. Pleader & J.P.	Brahmin	1910
SATHE, Rao Bahadur Hari Vinayak	81	Ret. Deputy Collector	Brahmin	1904
DAS GANU Maharaj Ganpatrao Dattatreya Sahasrabuddhe	78	Kirtankar	Brahmin	1890s
RASANE, Dattatreya Damodar	40	-	-	-
RASANE, Damodar, (Anna)	-		-	- -
ABDUL (Son of Sultan of Nanded)	65	Servant/disciple of Sai Baba	Muslim	1889
RANGARI, Abdul Rahim Samsuddin	65	Painter	Muslim	1913
KHOJA Rajaballi Mohammed	49	Contractor	Muslim	1910
DALALI, Adam	70	Estate Broker	Hindu	-
MARWADI Nandaram Sivaram	70	Merchant	Hindu	Shirdi Resident
MUNGE Lakshman Govind	72	Petition Writer	-	1890
KSHIRSAGAR Gangadar Vishnu	51	Telegraph Head Signaller Irrigation Dept.	Deshastha Brahmin	1935 family prior
PATEL Bayyaji Apaji	47	Policeman, Landowner of Shirdi	-	Shirdi res. Since babyhood
DEV, Ramchandra Sitaram (Balabhau, Balabhat)	55/60	Landlord	Brahmin	1908
MULKY, D.M.	-	M.B.B.S. Doctor, MD	-	1916

SAWANT Nagesh Atmaram	42	Police Sub-Inspector	Hindu	1922
HANSRAJ Kasibai	45	Widow	Hindu	1916
JAIKER Dinkar Rao	38	-	-	-
KOTHE, Bhikubai	42	-	Hindu	1908
CLERK Mr.	44	Clerk	Parsi	1913
DESHPANDE Somanath Shankar	51	Inspector of Police	Brahmin	-
DESHPANDE (SHYAMA) Madhav Rao	80	Teacher	Brahmin	-
KOLAMBO, Mr	57	-	Hindu Dowd Saraswat	-
BARKU, Tukaram	40	Landholder	Hindu Mahar	Shirdi Resident
PRADHAN M.G.	-	Clerk, Collector's Office	-	-
		PART III		
DUBE, Mama (Kasinath)	70	Shopkeeper	Brahmin	1909
MODAK Ramachandra Vaman	-	B.A., Engineer & Auditor	-	1909
DATAR, Gopal Bhaskar	-	B.A., LL.B.	Brahmin	1917
GARDE Kasinath Kanderao	65	B.A., LL.B., Ret. Sub-Judge	Hindu	1912
KUVALEKAR, Minathai (daughter of Nana Chandorkar)	49	Widow	-	1899
BHAVE Vinayak Daji	37	Clerk	Brahmin	1932

LELE Mukunda Sastri	58	Vedika	Konkanast Brahmin	1912
PESTONJAMAS	75	Railway Service	Parsi	Curstji Shapurji
LAGHATE, B.	70	B.A., LL.B., Ex Sub Judge	Brahmin	1913
KUSHA BHAV (Krishnaji Kasinath Joshi)	70	Magician/Black Magic	Brahmin	1908
SASTRI Balakrishna Govind Upasani	60	Professor of Sanskrit (brother of Upasani Maharaj)	Brahmin	1911
KHAIRIKAR Balakrishna Ramachandran	70	Vydika	Brahmin	1901
BADAVE Anand Ramchandra	64	Pujari	Brahmin	1906
KHARKAR Shridar Narayan	57	Accountant	-	-
SHROTRIE Shamrao Raoji	55	Record keeper	-	1909
VDHAVKAR Sadashiv Trimbuk	68	Railway worker	-	1909
VAIDYA Dattareya Vithal	25	Clerk Treasury Office	-	-
KOHOJKAR Sankar Balwant	42	BA Clerk	-	1911
SAMANT Ramachandra Ramakrishna	-	B.A. Landlord	Brahmin	1912
CHANDORKAR Bapu Rao	40	Landholder	Brahmin	1900
CHANDRABAI	66	Widow of Ramachanran Borker	-	1892
KARNIK	54	Bombay Customs	-	1911

Balwant Hari				
VAIDYA	45	Accountant	-	1912
Vinayak Appaji				
DEV, B.V	.-	Ret. Mamlatdar	-	-
JAYKER	70	painter	-	1916
Shama Rao				
VAIDYA	58	Ret. Railway servant	Hindu	1910
Balkrishna Waman				
BUA, RAMAGIRI	76	-	-	Shirdi Resident
(Baba called him Babugir)				
PATNAKAR, S.A. Kayastha	42	Artist		
PATEL Raghuji	65	Land Owner & Ret. Revenue Patel		
Ganpat Scinde				
NAIK, Sagun Meru	47	Operated teashop	Hindu	1911 Shirdi Res.
JAKADI,	40	Poojari	Brahmin	1914 Shirdi Res.
Lakshman Kacheswa				
alias Nanumama or Nanu Bhatt Poojari.				
JOSHI, Laxman Bhatt	-	-	-	-
TELI, Ganesh Ragunath	-	Honorary Magistrate	Hindu	-
GHAISAS	58	Ret. Postal Service	Konkanastha Brahmin	Post 1918
Ramachandra Vasudev				
SAIT	35	Sowcar	-	-
Amolchand Chandraban				
SAMANT				
Sri Ganeshwar Atmaram	-	Police Sub-Inspector	Hindu	1926
REGE Mr G.K.	-	Retired Tahsildar	Hindu	1912
Mr. X	-	-	-	1939
SUTAR, Appaji	-	-	-	1929

CHOTA KHAN Imambai	65	-	-	-
SAHARABUDDHE Sri M.V.	41	Civil Engineer	Brahmin	1931
SATAM Bhaskar Sadasiv	-	Sub-Inspector of Police	Hindu Mahratta	1940

KEY:

YEAR to SB means the year the devotee first came to Sai Baba.

PART I, II, or III refers to the book *Devotees' Experiences of Sri Sai Baba*, which originally was published in three booklets. Now it is published as one book by Akhanda Sainama Sapthaha Samithi, Hyderabad.

BOLD FONT AND UPPER CASE NAMES means the name the devotee used as a surname.

A '-' means the information is not given.

APPENDIX F

Sri Sai Satcharita

Extract from Chapter 39

Nobody believed that Baba knew Sanskrit. One day, He surprised all by giving a good interpretation of a verse from the *Bhagavad Gita* to Nanasaheb Chandorkar. A brief account about this matter was written by Mr. B.V.Deo, Retired Mamlatdar and published in Marathi in '*Shri Sai Leela*' magazine Volume IV. Sphuta Vishaya, page 563. Short accounts of the same are also published in '*Sai Baba's Charters and Sayings*' page 61 and in '*The Wondrous Saint Sai Baba*', page 36 - both by Brother B.V. Narasimhaswami. Mr B.V. Deo has also given an English version of this, in his statement dated 27-9-1936 and published on page 66 of *Devotees' Experiences, Part III*, published by the said Swami. As Mr. Deo has got first hand information about this subject from Nanasaheb himself, we give below his version.

Nanasaheb Chandorkar was a good student of Vedanta. He had read the *Gita* with commentaries and prided himself, on his knowledge of all that. He fancied that Baba knew nothing of all this or of Sanskrit. So, Baba one day pricked the bubble. These were the days before crowds flocked to Baba, when Baba had solitary talks at the Mosque with such devoteees. Nana was sitting near Baba and massaging his Legs and muttering something.

Baba - Nana, what are you mumbling to yourself?
Nana - I am reciting a *shloka* (verse) from Sanskrit.
Baba - What *Shloka*?
Nana - From *Bhagavad Gita*.
Baba - Utter it loudly.

Nana then recited *Bhagavad Gita* Chapter IV, 34 which reads as follows:

Tad viddhi Pranipatena Pariprasnena sevaya,
Upadeksyanti te jnanam Jnaninas tattvadarsinah

Baba - Nana, do you understand it?

Nana - Yes.

Baba - If you do, then tell me.

Nana - It means this - "Making *sashtanga Namaskar* i.e. prostration, questioning the Guru, serving him, learn what this jnana is. Then those *Jnanis* that have attained to real knowledge of the *Sad-Vastus* (Brahma) will give you *upadesha* (instruction) of *jnana*."

Baba - Nana, I do not want this collected purport of the whole stanza. Give me each word, its grammatical force and meaning. Then Baba explained it word by word.

Baba - Nana, is it enough to make prostration merely?

Nana - I do not know any other meaning for the word '*pranipata*' than 'making prostration.'

Baba - What is *pariprasna*?

Nana - Asking questions.

Baba - What does '*prasna*' mean?

Nana - The same (questioning).

Baba - If '*pariprasna*' means the same as *prasna* (question), why did Vyasa add the prefix '*pari*'? Was Vyasa off his head?

Nana - I do not know of any other meaning for the word 'pariprasna.'

Baba - '*Seva*'. What sort of '*seva*' is meant?

Nana - Just what we are doing always.

Baba - Is it enough to render such service?

Nana - I do not know what more is signified by the word '*seva*'.

Baba - In the next line '*upadeksyanti* to *jnanam*' can you so read as to read any other word in lieu of *Jnanam*?

Nana - Yes.

Baba - What word?

Nana - *Ajnanam*.

Baba - Taking the word (instead of *Jnana*) is any meaning made out of the verse?

Nana - No, Shankara Bhashya gives no such construction.

Baba - Never mind if he does not. Is there any objection to using the word 'Ajnana' if it gives a better sense?

Nana - I do not understand how to construe by placing '*Ajnana*' in it.

Baba - Why does Krishna refer Arjuna to *Jnanis* or *Tattvadarshis* to do his prostration, interrogation and service? Was not Krishna a *Tattvadarshi*, in fact *Jnana* itself?

Nana - Yes he was. But I do not make out why he referred Arjuna to *Jnanis*?

Baba - Have you not understood this?

Nana was humiliated. His pride was knocked on the head. Then Baba began to explain:

(1) It is not enough merely to prostrate before Jnanis. We must make *Sarvaswa Shananagati* (complete self-surrender) to the *Sadguru*.

(2) Mere questioning is not enough. The question must not be made with any improper motive or attitude or to trap the Guru and catch ay mistakes in the answer, or out of idle curiosity. It must be serious and with a view to achieve moksha of spiritual progress.

(3) *Seva* is not rendering service, retaining still the feeling that one is free to offer or refuse service. One must feel that he is not the master of the body, that the body is Guru's and exists merely to render service to him.

If this is done, the *Sadguru* will show you what the *Jnana* referred to in the previous stanza is.

Nana did not understand what is meant by saying that a Guru teaches *ajnana*. *Baba* - How is *Jnana Upadesh*, i.e. imparting of realization to be effected? Destroying ignorance is *Jnana*. (of Verse-Ovi-1396 of Jnaneshwari commenting on *Gita* 18-66 says- "removal of ignorance is like this, Oh Arjuna, If dream and sleep disappear, you are yourself. It is like that." Also Ovi 83 on Gita V-16 says - "Is there anything different of independent in Jnana beside the destruction of ignorance?") Expelling darkness means light. Destroying duality (*dwaita*) means non-duality (*adwaita*). Whenever we talk of destroying darkness, we talk of light. If we have to realize the *Adwaita* state, the feeling of *Dwaita* in ourselves has to be removed. That is the realization of the *Adwaita* state. Who can speak of *Adwaita* while remaining in *Dwaita*? If one did, unless one gets into the state, how can one know it and realise it?

Again the *Shishya* (disciple) like the *Sadguru* is really embodiment of *Jnana*. The difference between the two lies in the attitude, high realization, marvellous super-human *Sattva* (beingness) and unrivalled capacity and *Aishwarya Yoga* (divine powers). The *Sadguru* is *Nirguna* (without qualities), *Sat-Chit-Ananda* (Truth, Being, Bliss). He has indeed taken human form to elevate mankind and raise the world. But his real *Nirguna* nature is not destroyed thereby, even a bit. His beingness (or reality), divine power and wisdom remain undiminished. The disciple also is in fact of the same *swarupa* (form). But, it is overlaid by the effect of the *samskaras* of innumnerable births in the shape of ignorance, which hides from his view that he is *Shuddha Chaitanya* (*see B G Ch. V-15)*. As stated therein he gets the impressions "I am the *jiva*, a creature, humble and poor." The Guru has to root out these offshoots of ignorance and has to give upadesh or instruction. To the disciple, held spellbound for endless generations by the ideas of his being a creature, humble and poor, the Guru imparts in hundreds of births the teaching "You are God, you are mighty and opulent (rich).." Then he realizes a bit that he is God really. The perpetual delusion under which the disciple is labouring, that he is the body, that he is a creature (*jiva*) or ego, that God (*Paramatma*) and the world are different from him, is an error inherited from innumerable past births. From actions based on it, he has derived his joy, sorrows and mixtures of both. To remove this delusion, this error, this root ignorance, he must start the inquiry. How did the ignorance arise? Where is it? And to show him this is the Guru's *upadesh*. The following are the instances of *Ajnana*:-

1. I am a *Jiva* (creature).
2. Body is the soul (I am the body).
3. God, world and *Jiva* are different.

4. I am not God.
5. Not-knowing that body is not the soul.
6. Not knowing that God, world and *Jiva* are one.

Unless these errors are exposed to view the disciple cannot learn what is God, *Jiva*, world, body; how they are interrelatedand whether they are different from each other, or one and the same. To teach him these and destroy his ignorance is this instruction in *Jnana* or *Ajnana*. Why should *Jnana* be imparterd to the *jiva* (who is) a *Jnanamurti*? *Upadesh* is merely to show him his error and destroy his ignorance.

Baba added:- (1) *Pranipata* implies surrender. (2) Surrender must be body, mind and wealth: Re (3) Why should Krishna refer Arjuna to other *Jnanis*? "*Sadbhakta* takes everything to be Vasudev (*B G., VII-19, i.e. any Guru will be Krishna to the devotee*) and Guru takes disciple to be Vasudev and Krishna treats both as his *Prana* and *Atma* (*B G VII-18, commentary of Jnanadev on this*). As Shri Krishna knows that there are such Bhaktas and Gurus. He refers Arjuna to them so that their greatness may increase and be known.

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Dr. Marianne Warren was born in England where she earned her first BA degree from the University of Exeter. After emigrating to Canada, she became interested in Yoga, and went on to teach Indian Philosophy, Psychology and Religion as part of a Yoga Teachers' Training Course. She then went back to University to study for a BA in South Asian Religions at McMaster University, followed by her MA and Ph.D. at the University of Toronto. She now lives in Toronto, overlooking Lake Ontario, with her husband Michael. Her interest, in collaboration with her husband, is writing Indian-style devotional songs in English called bhajans, in honour of both Shirdi Sai Baba and Sathya Sai Baba and they have released two Compact Discs, which have been very well received internationally. Dr. Warren is currently teaching at the University of Toronto.

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A fresh new light is thrown upon the Maharashtrian saint Sai Baba of Shirdi in this rare and fascinating book by Dr Marianne Warren. Discovering that there is a rich history of Sufism in the Deccan in the past, especially at Khuldabad, where there was a large Sufi centre, and also at Pathri, Sai Baba's reputed birthplace, she first explores these areas. Then, in the light of this knowledge, she re-examines the life and teachings of Sai Baba. The results are spectacular. Sai Baba's previously bizarre or mystic behaviour and enigmatic sayings instantly become more understandable. By comprehending the stages of the Sufi path, such facets as Sai Baba's adherence to the vow of poverty, begging for food until the last few days of his life, fall naturally into place.

The confirmation of Sai Baba's Sufi status is the discovery and translation of Sai Baba's faqir servant Adbul's notebook, written in Urdu. The document contains Abdul's actual notes and jottings taken while reading the Quran with Sai Baba. From this, it is now possible to state authoritatively that Sai Baba was a Sufi Master, and directly taught the precepts of Islam and Sufism to his servant/pupil and probably to a host of wandering faqirs throughout the Deccan in the nineteenth century.

The goal of a Sufi aspirant is to reach God-realization - to realize his own inner divinity. Shirdi Sai Baba attained this divine status and throughout his life he also played the traditional role of a Sufi Master guiding others along the path.

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